

THE ARGOSY.

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ASHLEY.

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CHAPTER V.

CHEATING DOES NOT ALWAYS PROSPER.

SURELY the house was going to rack and ruin. Old servants, who had been in the family for years and years, were turned away, and a new, ill-organised set collected in their places. Even the steward was dismissed. The sober, steady lawyer, Mr. Graystock, the confidential adviser of the Ashleys, was also discarded, and Richard Storm, the rich but upstart attorney of Stopton, taken on in his stead. The tenants received notice of the raising of their rents, the poor cottagers of dismissal, the labourers had their wages ground down, and the annuities to the old pensioners were abruptly stopped. Never, surely, had a few short months seen the like changes.

Sir Harry Ashley had died without a will. His little son, who had succeeded to the title and property, had no legally-appointed guardian, and his mother, the widow, assumed control of everything. She was of warm blood, warmer than pertains to these European climes, and some of her acts were so outrageous, so wilfully unjust, that people began to say she was either a very bad woman or an insane one. Sir Harry had died in December, and thus matters went on till May; Lady Ashley perpetrating acts of injustice daily, and the neighbourhood crying shame upon her. Perhaps none let her know the estimation in which she was held in so marked a manner as did Mr. Gay, the village surgeon and apothecary. Lady Ashley was ailing, or fancied she was, and sent for him. The little man fairly returned for answer that he would not attend her. If Master Philip—he begged pardon, *Sir Philip*—or Miss Blanche required his services he would walk his legs off to attend them, at any hour of the day or night, but neither her ladyship nor her new servants need summons him: if they wanted a doctor, they might send to Stopton.

Stopton was four miles off, and her ladyship would have been delighted to dose Surgeon Gay with an ounce or two of his own arsenic. Failing the opportunity, she sent him notice to quit his

house, but the little doctor had it on a lease, and snapped his fingers at her. Lady Ashley was very ignorant of business matters.

"How many years has the lease to run now?" demanded Mrs. Gay, in a fright.

"Four."

"Then at the end of the four she will be safe to turn us out, and there's no other house in the village to suit us! Whatever shall we do?"

"Don't look so scared, child," laughed the merry-hearted surgeon. "We'll manage to pitch our tent somewhere. Four years is four years. Somebody else may reign at Ashley by then."

Somebody else did.

On a summer day in May, when the hedges were fragrant with spring flowers, when the linden-trees were bursting out, and the oak-balls were growing large; when the cuckoo was crying its note, and the blue sky was serene and cloudless, the open barouche of Lady Ashley was seen winding from the village towards her house. She occupied one seat of it, in company with a snarling, snapping dog, "Trap." She was a handsome woman, dark as a gipsy, with an arrogant cast of countenance, and keen, flashing eyes, her widow's cap suiting well her style of beauty. Opposite to her sat her children in their deep mourning, Blanche, an elegant child of ten, with delicate features, and flaxen curls shading her rosy cheeks, a perfect little beauty; Sir Philip, a stout boy of nearly six, his face broad and coarse, his eyes, hair and complexion nearly colourless. Not one of the three bore the slightest resemblance to either of the others; but Blanche was very like her late father, Sir Harry Ashley.

The carriage was going at a slow pace up the hill, when an old woman, neatly attired, leaning on the arm of a stalwart man dressed in velveteen, approached it from the side of the road, her hands raised and her lips moving, as if she would crave speech of Lady Ashley. The latter haughtily averted her head, but a second thought seemed to strike her, and she ordered the coachman to stop.

It was Watson, the gamekeeper, and his mother. He had not been discharged with the rest of the servants: perhaps his turn had not yet come. He drew aside whilst the aged woman, very tall in her day, but stooping now, approached close, and laid her hand on the door of the carriage for support, and she addressed Lady Ashley in very respectful terms, imploring for the continuance of the pension she had so long enjoyed. Twice had she been to Ashley to endeavour to obtain speech of her ladyship, who had refused to see her.

"I will not renew your pension for a day," replied Lady Ashley. "You never ought to have had it: it has been so much money taken from my children."

"Oh, mamma," whispered Blanche, the tears rising in her blue eyes, "do give it her! Papa was so fond of old Hannah."

"My leddy, it is nae many years I can trouble the world. I am

turned fourscore. It will be a hard thing for me to go into the workhouse. Indeed, I was brought up far above what you see me now."

"Brought up to absurd Scotch superstitions," retorted Lady Ashley, "and the best thing you can do is to return and live amongst them. Do you see that child?" indicating her boy.

The old lady cast her dim eyes across the carriage, beyond Blanche. "God bless him for a bonnie boy!" she aspirated, "but he is nae an Ashley."

"Not an Ashley!" sharply spoke up her ladyship. "What do you mean, woman?"

"I mean nae harm, my leddy; ye didna think I could ever speak it of you or him. And if he has na the ken o' the Ashleys, he is but as God made him. The little lassie here has, but nae he."

"He is Sir Philip Ashley," repeated Lady Ashley, with marked emphasis, bending her head forward, till her face was almost in contact with Hannah's. "You once insulted me by saying my child must be Sir Ryle, to inherit Ashley after his father."

There was an old tradition in the Ashley family that only three names could succeed to the baronetcy, Arthur, Henry and Ryle, each in its turn. Certain it is that none others ever had succeeded.

"My leddy," cried the old woman earnestly, "when they came home and told me good Sir Harry was gone, and that it was a Sir Philip who had succeeded him, I nae believed them, I didna indeed. I knew that in the course o' nature Sir Ryle ought to ha' come next, and I canna think now that it's a' canny, a' as it ought to be. We reckoned that the heir to succeed Sir Harry would be Master Ryle, Mr. Arthur's son. We knew there was this child of Sir Harry's, as well as Mr. Arthur himself, that stood between little Ryle and the title, but we believed that it would be surely brought about, as it always had been brought about, and that Master Ryle would now be the chief o' Ashley. My leddy, are ye sure that it is all straight? There was a Sir Murdoch cam into Ashley once, but he was proved to be a usurper, and was driven out o' it. Are ye sure this child *is* the rightful heir?"

What there could have been to excite Lady Ashley in these words was best known to herself, but excited she was to unseemly fury, and she set the dog on the old woman. "Have at her, Trap! Seize her! Bite her! Hiss-s-s-s! Have at her, good Trap!"

The dog sprang at Hannah, fury, like that of his mistress, seated in his face. But generous little Blanche, with a cry of grief, threw herself before the helpless old woman, and the dog seized her by the chin.

Lady Ashley disengaged the dog, he was obedient to *her*, and Blanche, in the midst of her terror, thought not of her own hurt, though the dog had drawn blood. "Dear Hannah, good Hannah," she sobbed, clasping the aged hands, "I am very sorry. When I

grow up and have money of my own, I will give it to you: you may be sure I will, because my dear papa did."

"God help us!" muttered the gamekeeper, as he sprang forward to drag his mother out of the way of the moving carriage, "and God help them as come after us, if Sir Philip should resemble his mother in wickedness of temper, as that drowned young Carnegie did!"

LINDEN, the pretty house jutting on Ashley Park, was once more alive with voices, for Arthur Ashley and his family suddenly returned to it.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" demanded little Surgeon Gay, gazing in dismay at his shattered appearance.

"What have other people been doing to me?" retorted Mr. Ashley. "I have been ailing ever since the last spring I passed here, when I had inflammation of the lungs. I don't think I was thoroughly cured."

"I told you you were not. I told you you had no business to return to public life, worrying yourself over your political schemes."

"It is very easy to preach prudence, Gay, but when a man has a family to provide for, how can he sit idly down? My certain income, arising from Thorncliff, is barely four hundred a year, and, with this house, that is all I have."

"Better be idle than work yourself out of health and life, as you have been doing."

"Working for little end. I could not keep out of pecuniary embarrassment, and the annoyance that has caused me, combined with the frustration of my political hopes and the cloud which Lady Ashley managed to cast upon my name and spirit, have been too much for me. Now that I can no longer stave off my illness, I have come back to Linden and quiet. I ruptured a blood-vessel about a month ago."

"Ah, it is the way with you all—putting off, putting off! If you had lived here, you would have been well now and have saved house-rent."

"That is why I have come," said Mr. Ashley, with a laugh, which sounded more sad than merry, "to save house-rent and to economise. Will you believe it, Gay?" he added, dropping his voice; "we keep now but two servants. I cannot afford more, and Mrs. Ashley works herself to a skeleton amongst the children."

"I never could have thought to see that reverse of the natural order of things—an Ashley reduced to two handmaids," observed the surgeon, his face twisted into a look of comical concern. "Why, I and Mrs. Gay manage as much as that. Oh, well, cheer up: Arthur Ashley will never stop long at that low ebb. You know that Sir Harry left you a handsome fortune, five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and that tigress of a woman destroyed the will?"

"I know, I know. I shall demand it of her. The money is mine by every law of justice."

"You will never get it," cried Surgeon Gay. "You can form no idea of the way she goes on, the awful things she does. A pretty life you and Major Hayne would have had of it with her as guardians to the children."

"Is Major Hayne here?"

"Major Hayne! he went off the day after Sir Harry's funeral. The neighbourhood was scandalised that you were not invited to it, and her ladyship had a few hard names bestowed upon her, I can tell you. Major Hayne called on me as he went away, and sat for half an hour on my surgery-counter, talking about her. She had turned him out of Ashley, she had, indeed, Mr. Arthur, as true as that my name's Ned Gay. He said he was going, then, to see if he could make things right for you and your eldest son, and he might be back in a few weeks or a few months, as the case might be."

"Make things right for me and my son!" echoed Mr. Ashley. "Going where?"

"How should I know? To Timbuctoo, for anything I can tell. I could make neither top nor tail of what he said, and told him so, but he did not explain."

"When is the best time for seeing her ladyship?" demanded Mr. Ashley.

"She makes a point of being denied to everyone who is on her bad books, go at what time they will. Squire Prout called one day, and my lady sent word out she was not at home, and stood at the French window all the while, staring him in the face. You will never get in."

"I will," replied Mr. Ashley. "And you have heard of the Ashley will. Sir Harry did not possess it, but my father and Sir Arthur did. I will try mine."

"If you would take my advice, you would not go at all. Great excitement might prove fatal to you: and I'll defy anyone to stave off excitement, if they get into a contest with Lady Ashley."

"I must take care of my wife and children," was the reply. "I'll try and take care of myself."

That same evening, as Lady Ashley sat alone in her dining-room after dinner, the door opened and Mr. Ashley appeared before her. She was inexpressibly surprised, not knowing him to have returned to the neighbourhood, but soon her face lighted up into a glow of triumph, and she motioned him to a seat.

He sat down in the old seat of his boyhood, for it was the home where he had been brought up, brought up to consider himself its heir. And its heir he had been, until she, with her studied fascinations, had wiled over his uncle in his advancing years to marry her, and so had deprived him of it.

"To what circumstances am I indebted for the honour of a visit from Mr. Ashley?"

"Your question and surprise are natural, Lady Ashley; for it is

indeed a matter of astonishment that my footsteps should have brought me to this house, when it has ceased to be my uncle's."

"The house is mine," she answered, indecent satisfaction lighting her dark face. "You formerly thought that when Sir Harry was gone it would be yours."

"I did not come here to recriminate or to speak of the past, Lady Ashley," he observed, "but of the present. Sir Harry Ashley made a will before he died."

"He plotted one; he and Major Hayne. I prevented its being carried out."

"He *made* one, I believe," repeated Mr. Ashley: "made it and signed it."

"And I rendered it invalid, I tell you. I tore and burnt it before their faces. A couple of old idiots! with their annuities here, and their legacies there: the largest one was to Mr. Arthur Ashley. They bound my power down to nothing, and left him, one of the idiots, and Mr. Arthur Ashley, absolute over my children. Did you think I would submit to that, from what you knew of me as Lauretta Carnegie?"

She cast the light of her flashing eyes full upon him. He understood their strange, hidden meaning: understood it as none other could have done.

"The legacy was five-and-twenty thousand pounds, as I am given to understand," he resumed.

"I dare say it was, that or more. The amount is of no consequence."

"Of every consequence, for that legacy must be mine. Will you hear what I have to say, Lady Ashley, hear it without ridicule?"

"Say on."

"If you look at me, you will see that I must speedily follow my uncle. I am dying of the complaint which took my father, disease of the lungs. Save a very poor income, I shall leave my wife and five children unprovided for. This money, which Sir Harry left to them, will increase it to riches—if we estimate riches by my present fortune; and it is theirs by every right of justice. To you, Lady Ashley, it is a trifling sum, and your children will not miss it. Let it be theirs."

"Upon what ground do you urge your request?"

"The ground of right; of equity; and"—he sank his voice to a whisper, and drew his chair nearer to hers—"upon restitution. You know you owe me that, Lady Ashley, for to you I date the ruin of my health and prospects."

"Ah!" she said, whilst a curious smile curled her mouth.

"When you brought that foul accusation against me in the public road of this village, that I had drowned your child, an accusation which you knew to be as false as I did, depriving me of my seat in the House of Commons, turning the public mind against me, you

struck me my death blow. When I saw my friends looking coldly upon me—friends from infancy, who should have known me better—I could not bear up against it. Never strong, my energies seemed to desert me, and I have since then been a failing man, lacking the spirit to make things prosper. And now that I have confessed this, let it pass for ever. Take my forgiveness, Lady Ashley, now, as we sit here alone, for all you have dealt to me, but deal with compassion by my children. For myself I do not ask the money: let it not come to them, if you will, till after my death."

"You speak of compassion," she returned; "which of us has most need of compassion, you or I?"

"I do not understand."

"If I have blighted your prospects, who blighted my heart, my fair morning of life?"

He repeated, "I do not understand," but this time in a faltering tone, as if he did understand, at least partially.

"When I came to Ashley, a young stranger, who praised my beauty admired my waywardness, which others condemned, and strove in secret, with his honeyed words, to win the affections of my maiden heart? And when he had drawn me to love him, with a fiery, ardent passion that you cold Europeans little reck of, he told me that he had only been playing with me—that he loved another. Do you know who that man was, Arthur Ashley?"

He did not answer that it was himself, though he might have done so. But she certainly put the case strongly.

"I would have laid down my life for you," she went on, passionate tears forcing themselves to her eyes with the vivid painfulness of the retrospect. "I could have loved you for ever. You were, as I thought then, the undoubted heir to Ashley, but had you become a beggar, scorned, traduced, despised, I should have gloried in loving you all the more. I do not know—in spite of my hatred to you—that the love has quite left my heart."

"It was done in thoughtlessness," he murmured; "I never meant to make such an impression upon you. How could I, when I was engaged to marry Anna Rivers?"

"Don't mention her in my presence," she vehemently interrupted; "her name has been to my feelings, since, as a searing iron. And you come to ask aid for her and her children! You are a bold man, Arthur Ashley."

"Visit your reproaches upon me, Lady Ashley, but not upon my wife. She does not deserve them, for she was innocent and unconscious throughout the whole business. I alone was to blame, and perhaps you, also, Lady Ashley, in some measure. But let us forget these grievances; surely they took place long enough ago."

"I told you that evening—you remember it—that I would never forget. I never will."

"But you will forgive?"

"I will never forgive, you or yours. You present yourself here to demand a fortune for your wife and children : I would not give them a piece of bread if they were starving in the streets. I hope that your conduct will be visited upon her for whom you forsook me ; that in her lowly widowhood she will be overwhelmed with cares and poverty ; that she will stop at Linden to live—or starve—and feast her envious eyes, daily, with my prosperity and my children's position and riches : the position she expected to occupy, when they deemed you the undisputed heir to Ashley."

"Cease, cease, I pray you," he implored, lifting his thin hands ; "these sentiments are not befitting a woman ; they would befit——"

"A fiend, perhaps you would like to say"—for he had hesitated. "Well and good. Who made me a fiend ? You did, Arthur Ashley. In that one evening you changed my heart—happy in you and your image, and which you might have moulded to your will, even to good—you changed it into a sea of hatred, revenge, jealousy, all struggling for mastery as do the flames of a living fire. The struggle is not yet over, the revenge partly is : you and she are reduced to becoming my despised supplicants, and I reign at Ashley. Fare you well, sir. Our paths lie apart, as you willed it then."

She rose and pointed imperiously to the door. He rose also, and stood looking at her ; possibly debating with himself whether he should make another effort to soften her. Soften that malignant countenance ! With a cold motion of the hand, by way of adieu, he passed out of the room.

The disappointment seemed to have taken from him what little energy was left, and he would sit silent for hours, brooding over the gloomy prospects of his children when he should be no more. And so, May passed into June, when a rupture of a blood-vessel again took place, but a very slight one.

One evening, towards the latter part of the month, a visitor was announced. "A gentleman," the maid said, and Arthur's tottering limbs rose to receive him. It was Major Hayne. Many years had elapsed since they met, at the christening of Carnegie.

"Is this your wife ?" exclaimed the Major, taking Anna's hands, and giving her fair cheek a fatherly kiss. "She does not look very strong."

"She is over-worked and over-anxious, Major. I told Anna yesterday, if I could have foreseen how all this was to end, I would never have married her. I shall soon leave her to a life of struggle with the world. Five young children, and very little provision for them."

"Oh, Major Hayne !" exclaimed Mrs. Ashley, the tears rising to her eyes, "if you could only persuade him to think of these things in a less gloomy light ! I am as rich as I care to be ; we manage very well. He thinks I have so much to do ; but I am glad of it, for an active life suits me. I should be quite happy, if it were not for my

anxiety about him : but I know he would get well, if he strove to rally his spirits."

"My dear, I have no doubt you are very comfortable and quite rich enough," said the Major, in a gay tone. "Your husband estimates his income by what it would have been had he succeeded to Ashley, so of course it suffers in comparison. What should you say at coming into Ashley now, Arthur? You are still the next heir. Who knows but you may?"

"Who knows but I may be king of England?" retorted Mr. Ashley. "Sir Philip is a strong, hearty lad, and I am a dying man. It is but right that the direct heirs should succeed."

The Major gave a grunt, which ended in a laugh, rose, and walked sharply across the room, smiling still. He sat down again by Mr. Ashley.

"I have an old maxim, Ryle ——"

"Arthur," interrupted Mr. Ashley.

"Never mind ; you are more like your father than ever, and I forget to call you anything but Ryle. Who is that?"

A handsome boy of ten had entered the room, with the bright complexion, the fair curls, and the noble features characteristic of the Ashleys.

"That is Ryle, if you will," said Mr. Ashley. "My eldest son. Ryle, speak to Major Hayne."

The child advanced with the fearless step of a young chieftain, and held out his hand with a modest, pleasant look in his large grey eyes, as they were raised to the stranger.

"Upon my word, but you are a brave lad!" muttered Major Hayne, in a tone of gratification. "You would make a fitter baronet than the ungainly little chap who bears the title. What should you say at being called Sir Ryle?"

"I wish papa could have been Sir Arthur," answered the boy boldly, "because he would not have turned off all the poor people. But Mr. Gay says that when Philip gets old enough, perhaps he will take them on again. Blanche would : she says so."

"Do you see much of your cousins?"

"No, sir. We met in the lane one day and were gilding oakballs together, but when Lady Ashley heard of it, she flogged them both, and said she would flog them ten times worse if they ever spoke to us again. We are not so rich as they are."

"And if they grew poor and you grew rich—if you lived at Ashley, for instance, and Blanche and Philip in a small house like Linden, would you object to play with them because they were poor?"

"No, no," answered the boy ; "I would ask them to come and live with us at Ashley."

"You'll do, my boy," exclaimed the Major. "Always be kind and considerate to others : remember to be so when you are Sir Ryle."

"You may go and play, Ryle," interposed Mr. Ashley, a touch of

vexation perceptible in his tone. "For goodness' sake, Major," he added, as the lad left the room, "do not put such notions in the poor children's heads; it will only be worse for them hereafter. I strive to render them humble."

"I called in on Gay as I came along," observed the Major, "and a precious account he gave me of her ladyship. Why, she has been playing up Old Nick with the estate and the people since her husband died."

"Oh, it is shameful! It excites me to think of it. A disgrace to the very name of Ashley."

"Arthur," resumed Major Hayne, waiting till Mr. Ashley's fit of coughing had subsided, "I was about to say, when interrupted by Master Ryle, that I hold to an old maxim, 'Look on the bright side of things, but prepare for the worst.' I want you to do the same. You will get well if you take care ——"

"The blood-vessel ——"

"Nonsense to the blood-vessel! You'll get over it, I tell you, if you take care; but, to carry out my maxim, I would have you prepare for the other side of the case. I once asked Sir Harry if he had made his will: permit me to ask you the same question."

"Yes: such as it is; with nothing to leave."

"Well, I would have you make another, and with the least possible delay. Send for your lawyer to-morrow morning—send to him to-night, that he may be here in the morning. Make it as if you—or Ryle, failing you—were in possession of Ashley. Leave directions for all things; the disposal of the property, the guardianship of your children; just as if you were the reigning baronet."

"But Philip is the baronet," returned Mr. Ashley, looking at Major Hayne as if he doubted his sanity.

"Never you mind about Philip. Do as I tell you."

"I cannot, Major Hayne. I cannot will away property that is not mine."

The Major rose from his seat and walked about, as before, glancing furtively at Mr. Ashley.

"Now if you could only undertake to keep yourself calm, and not excite that blood-vessel you are so fond of, I would let you into a secret. Do you think I may, Mrs. Ashley?"

"Certainly you may. Arthur's spirits and health are altogether too low, now, to be dangerously excited," she replied.

"Well, I'll try it," answered the Major. "You blamed me, Arthur, for raising notions in Master Ryle, but suppose I tell you that he is certain, if he lives, to be Sir Ryle Ashley?"

"I should say you were speaking very foolishly—with your pardon, Major."

"And if I add that he, Ryle, is the present heir apparent?"

"That he cannot be. When I die, he will be Philip's heir presumptive."

"But you are not dead : you are alive and talking. What a man this husband of yours is, Mrs. Ashley ; persisting in putting himself out of the world, like this ! Ryle is the present heir apparent."

"To Philip?" uttered the bewildered Mr. Ashley.

"No. To you. What shall you say, yet, if I add that you are Sir Arthur Ashley?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Mrs. Ashley, rising in concern, "Sir Philip must be dead ! Poor child ! What has happened, Major Hayne?"

"Not he, he is as live and fat as ever, but he is not Sir Philip Ashley. Arthur, you are the real, genuine, bonâ fide baronet, and have been since the moment of your uncle's death."

They sat in consternation. "It is not possible," whispered Mrs. Ashley.

"It is," returned the Major. "You, my dear, are the legitimate Lady Ashley, and that old harridan up at the house is only the dowager. It is true, as I am a living man. Now don't go and make your hands tremble like that, sir, or I'll unsay all I have said."

"Do explain yourself," gasped Arthur, falling back in his chair. "How can it be?"

"The boy, Philip, is a usurper, a palmed-off heir. Neither her child nor Sir Harry's."

"Not their child?"

"No more than he is yours or mine."

"But she was confined at St. Ouest of a male child, who was named Philip?"

"She was. But after I and Sir Harry departed, leaving her there, for she said, in her laziness, she was not well enough to travel, that child died. What did my lady do? Instead of writing to Sir Harry, she hushed the matter up, and took an infant in the village, who had lost its parents, as Philip's substitute, and brought him home, six months afterwards, as the heir to Ashley."

"But," debated Mr. Ashley, running over probabilities and improbabilities in his mind, as a man of judgment never fails to do, "how could she have concealed it from the attendants, those she had with her?"

"She had only Nana, the coloured woman, who would go through fire and water at her bidding, and the child's nurse, a native of St. Ouest. Nana must of course have been in the secret, and the nurse she discharged when they reached Paris. Oh, I have got all particulars, signed, sealed and sworn to, besides that very nurse, and a woman named Mary Baux, the false child's next of kin, from whom my lady got him, and a clerk from the *mairie*, as they call it, to swear to the register. He's a fellow with a beard a foot long, and frightened the barmaid at the Ashley Arms into hysterics when I took them there just now, to be lodged for the night."

"How came you with them?" inquired Arthur.

"I have been to St. Ouest, hunting them up, and a long job I have had of it, for some of them were scattered. When I came here last Christmas and saw Philip, his remarkable fairness struck upon me with wonder, and I told both Sir Harry and Lady Ashley he was not the child born at St. Ouest, for that child had been dark as night. They insisted it was ; at least she did, Sir Harry only spoke from her : though he did tell me the change in the boy's skin and eyes had astonished him, when Lady Ashley first brought him home. Sir Harry's suspicions were not awakened ; it was hardly likely ; and it is as well they were not, with death so near. Mine, however, were more than suspicions, they were certainties, and away I went to St. Ouest. I found out my lady's trick, collected the evidence in all due form, the certificate of the real Philip's death and burial, with the registering clerk, as I tell you, to swear to it, and brought the two women to confront my lady, in case of her proving restive. She'll have a surprise she little looks for to-morrow morning."

"It is wonderful!" uttered Mr. Ashley, scarcely able to believe his own senses.

"Rather so. My stars! what a mistake Sir Harry made in marrying that woman! But, Arthur, why do you suppose she did all this?"

"With the view to reigning over Ashley, I suppose, as mother of the heir."

"Guess again, my boy. That motive may have had its weight, but her chief aim was to prevent your succeeding to Ashley. Hatred to you, from all I can hear and see, seems to have been the moving spring of her married life."

"Ah, no doubt," answered Mr. Ashley, in an evasive tone.

"And serve you right, Master Arthur, if her hatred had only extended to trifles," whispered the Major, beyond the hearing of Mrs. Ashley. "You young gallants think that to make sport of a woman's heart is fair game, but you get paid out sometimes."

"She has paid me out pretty sharply," responded Arthur, the tone of his voice betraying both consciousness and annoyance.

"She has, and be shot to her. Well, her turn will come to-morrow. Will you do what I suggested? Graystock I shall want myself, and have secured him, but you can have somebody from his office."

"You mean about my will. What hurry is there for a day or two?"

"It will be better done. I wish it."

"Then I will certainly do it. I am under unbounded obligations to you, Major Hayne."

Major Hayne did not do his work by halves. He had made his preparations before his visit to Arthur, and the following day he waited upon Lady Ashley. Not alone. He had pressed into the service the high sheriff of the county, Colonel Rusherford, an old and faithful friend of Sir Harry's. Mr. Graystock, the lawyer, and little

Mr. Gay, the surgeon, the Major also took with him. The French witnesses were close at hand.

Ferocious as Lady Ashley's fits of passion had sometimes been, they were as nothing compared with the one which overtook her when Major Hayne opened his business. She denied everything; she swore the child, Philip, was hers; she would have quitted the room and refused to listen, but they compelled her to remain. "When your ladyship shall be calm, we will discuss this matter quietly," said Colonel Rusherford, "and the steps which must be taken."

"There is nothing to discuss," she impetuously retorted. "How dare you come here with your plotting tales that Sir Philip is not the rightful heir?"

"Philip Ashley died at St. Ouest, and was buried there," said Major Hayne. "He died of convulsions, and his grave is on the outside of the Catholic cemetery: and I have taken the liberty, ma'am, of putting a gravestone over it, which you forgot to do. This child, whom you call Sir Philip, is Robert Baux, the son of the postilion who was killed, driving you and Sir Harry into St. Ouest. Do you deny having adopted that man's child?"

"It is false, it is an infamous fabrication," she reiterated, after a momentary hesitation. "I adopted no child, and my own did not die."

"Take care, Lady Ashley," interposed Major Hayne. "I have just returned from St. Ouest and have brought with me ample proofs. On the evening of the day on which your child was buried you went with Célestine, one of the maids at the inn, to Baux's house, and offered to adopt the infant orphan. Marie Baux, the aunt, to whom the charge of the postilion's children had fallen, delivered the infant to you then, and Célestine carried it to the inn. Célestine is here, Lady Ashley."

Lady Ashley was visibly startled. "*Here!*"

"Outside. Waiting to be called in."

"And you would believe the word of a miserable servant girl in preference to mine!" she uttered, recovering her equanimity. "Colonel Rusherford, I am surprised that you should have lent your countenance to so infamous a business."

"Célestine is not alone, my lady," imperturbably proceeded Major Hayne. "Marie Baux is with her. And the wet-nurse is also with her; the one who nursed your child first, and this false Philip afterwards, and whom you sent back to St. Ouest, after reaching Paris. And the official who registered the death of your child has come over with the three women to take care of them."

"Lady Ashley," interposed Colonel Rusherford, "I do not wish to hurt your feelings, but the fraud is undeniable and the proofs are at hand. Under these circumstances, it will cause you least pain to give up Ashley quietly. I do not mean this day—Sir Arthur would not wish that; but say between now and a week's time."

"*Sir Arthur?*" she ejaculated, as if paralysed.

"Sir Arthur," calmly repeated Colonel Rusherford. "Ashley is his now, and he has been wrongfully kept out of it since his uncle's death."

"And in giving you a week to get out of it, ma'am, Sir Arthur and Lady Ashley will show more consideration for you than you have shown for them," added Major Hayne.

The words seemed to stun her. "Sir Arthur and Lady Ashley!" Had it come to that at last, after all her sinful manœuvring? She fell back in her chair, and her face assumed a livid hue through its dark skin.

"Should you ever cause one infant to personate another again, my lady," proceeded Major Hayne, "take care that their eyes and skin are not so remarkably dissimilar. There's the point that did for your scheme."

She sprang from her seat, fury in her voice and gesture. "I care not what you say—you are all in a plot against me. Philip is Sir Philip Ashley, and you shall not dispossess him."

Then they called in the witnesses, and the child, Philip, was fetched from the nursery by Mr. Gay. He alone would have been sufficient evidence, for he was the very image of Marie Baux, his father's sister. The latter clasped him to her with kisses and tears: she knew the Baux face; there was no mistaking it.

There is no necessity to pursue the bringing home of the proofs to Lady Ashley. They were too powerful to be confuted, even by her, or by a gentleman from her lawyer's office, who had been galloped for in red-hot haste; and the conviction forced itself upon her, in the midst of her stormy passion, that she must indeed abandon Ashley. And now arose a secondary punishment. Sir Harry Ashley, in his will, had provided for the contingency of Philip's death, and Arthur's consequent succession, and had amply provided for his wife and Blanche. That will she had destroyed, and a large portion of the money that would have been hers, now came to Arthur Ashley.

When the sad dispute and the confusion of the day came to an end, the gentlemen quitted Lady Ashley. Mr. Graystock departed for home, but the other three turned towards Linden, to report to Sir Arthur. Who should they meet on their way but the gamekeeper, Watson, moving his goods and chattels; his old mother and youngest child seated at the top of the cart, his wife and the elder children walking behind it.

"Hallo, Watson!" cried Surgeon Gay, "where are you decamping to?"

"My lady has turned me out, gentlemen," sadly answered the man. "She gave me warning, and for fear I should not go to my time, which was to-day, sent in a man this morning to enforce it, and keep possession. I have took a cottage over the hill, and Squire

Prout has promised to find me employment. Oh, sirs ! my heart's a'most broke. I never thought to see Ashley come to this."

"Just turn the horse's head round," said Major Hayne.

"Sir ?"

"Turn round and go back to the lodge and put your goods in again," he added to the bewildered gamekeeper. "If the man disputes it, tell him to come down to Linden, and get his orders from Sir Arthur Ashley. Her ladyship is nothing but the dowager, without any power whatever, for the child, Philip, was no son of Sir Harry's. Sir Arthur is your master now."

"The Lord be thanked !" uttered the relieved man. "It's like awaking from a nightmare."

"Are ye sure it is Sir Arthur, sirs ?" cried the old lady from her high seat, though tears of joy were falling from her eyes. "Are ye sure it is nae Sir Ryle ?"

"Why Sir Ryle ?" demanded Colonel Rusherford, with a smile. "Why not Sir Arthur ?"

"Ye ken weel, Colonel Rusherford, that Sir Ryle must come after Sir Harry ; that it always has come. I knew there was something not straight, not canny, when they said there was a Sir Philip ; and I dinna think now it will be Sir Arthur."

"But it is Sir Arthur, ma'am," responded Major Hayne. "And has been ever since Sir Harry's death, if we had but known it."

"But we did nae know it, sir," persisted the old lady, "and he never reigned. No, no, it will nae be Sir Arthur, now, to come into Ashley."

They pursued their way, leaving the gamekeeper to turn round his cart. When near to Linden, little Ryle met them, running in great agitation.

"Oh, sir," he exclaimed to Surgeon Gay, "make haste to my dear father. He is a great deal worse, and his mouth is bleeding."

"The blood-vessel again !" muttered the doctor to Major Hayne ; "this is what I feared when I told you yesterday to get him to a speedy settlement of his affairs. Come along, Master Ryle ; let us have a run."

He was a spare, active man, and he sped along as fast as Ryle. They soon gained the house. "You stop outside, my dear," he said, "while I go in."

"There's mamma watching for you," returned Ryle.

"Where is he, Lady Ashley ?" asked the surgeon. "In which room ?"

In the midst of her distress she started at the title, almost as the other Lady Ashley had done. Were ease and rank indeed her husband's, now that he was dying ?

In a short time the doctor came out again. The two gentlemen and the little boy were on the lawn before the house. For merry Surgeon Gay, he was looking very sad.

"The old lady was right," he whispered to the former. "Sir Arthur was not fated to reign; this child is already chief of Ashley."

Ryle, of a quick, sensitive nature, whose fears were already on the work, noted the hushed voices, the pained looks. "Papa is worse!" he quickly cried to Mr. Gay, "and they have been telling me that he is Sir Arthur Ashley. Oh, sir! he is not dead, is he?"

"My dear child," said the surgeon, taking Ryle's hand, "your father is gone to a better world. See how bright and beautiful it looks up there," he added, pointing to the calm blue summer sky. "No storms, no anger, no death; all peace and love and pleasantness. I wish the time was come for us all to be there." But Sir Ryle sank down on the grass with a wailing cry.

ON as fair a day as that, they entered on their home at Ashley: Lady Ashley, in her deep sorrow and her widow's weeds, with her younger children and her eldest child, its owner. Very speedily had Lauretta, Lady Ashley, when she found it must be, evacuated Ashley. Sir Arthur had desired, in the will made the morning of his death, that the property left to her by Sir Harry in the will which she had rendered nugatory, might be given up to her *upon one condition*—that Blanche should be brought up at Ashley, under the care of his wife Anna. For the welfare of the little girl, and the honour of the name of Ashley, he would not suffer her to remain with her mother, if he could by any means prevent it. Lauretta, Lady Ashley, agreed to this, through her solicitor, Mr. Storm, and seemed rather glad than otherwise to be relieved of the trouble of Blanche. She announced her intention of departing for India, the favourite home of her earlier days. England was a villainous country to live in, she said, and Englishmen were ruffians, false and detestable—she would take herself away from them. Major Hayne, who had the management of Sir Arthur's affairs, was in glee when he heard it, and sent a polite message back, that, failing an escort, he would conduct her thither himself, sooner than India should be disappointed of her. As to Philip (so to call him), he was laden with toys and sent back to St. Owest, with his aunt and the other two, and the man with the beard, a small annuity being settled on him for life.

So the place returned to its former peace, for recent wrongs were all righted, and old Hannah Watson said she should wait her call for departure with calmness, now that Sir Ryle reigned, in his own turn, over Ashley.

A GUILTY SILENCE.

CHAPTER XX.

MARGARET'S TRIUMPH.

MARGARET Davenant was a good physiognomist, but her skill in this respect availed her nothing in her efforts to read her sister's face, eagerly as she scanned it, when the little party met together at the ruined water-mill. Beatrice wore her mask as though such a disguise were natural to her, and Margaret was utterly at fault. She felt chilled and despondent, and sat during the journey home in a fit of silence that was almost sullen, greatly to the distress of Mr. Plock, to whom the plea of a bad headache was not so satisfactory as it ought to have been. She brightened up, however, for a little while as they neared the end of their ride, and bade the young curate a kindly farewell, knowing nothing of the mischief she had done him, nor how, for days and nights to come, she would be the chief object of his thoughts. For Mr. Plock was many weeks older before his sudden bramble-fire of love for Margaret Davenant died out utterly, expiring for lack of nourishment, and before his mind worked itself back into its old quiet groove.

"I am so tired that I think I shall go straight to bed," said Beatrice, as soon as she and Margaret had parted from the reluctant Miss Easterbrook, who would willingly have sat up half the night talking over the day's adventures. "I suppose you will not stay up long?"

"Only till I have written one or two business notes," said Margaret, "which I want to go by the early post to-morrow."

The sisters bade each other good-night. "She has nothing to tell me," sighed Margaret, as Beatrice closed the door behind her; "and all that I have done has been done to no purpose."

She bent her mind resolutely to the task before her; but long after the notes were written she sat at her desk, her face buried in her hands, thinking sadly. "The fruit of my one crime is like an apple of the Dead Sea," she murmured to herself as she rose from her seat, "turning to ashes and bitterness in my mouth."

Then she went upstairs to her bedroom, feeling chill and weary after the reaction of the day, and was just setting down her candlestick, when she heard Beatrice's familiar tap, tap, on the wall that divided the two rooms. "What can Trix want me for?" she said. "Silly child! she ought to have been in bed long ago."

The candle was out, and Trix was standing by the window, like a lovely ghost in moonshine, the folds of her white dressing-gown wrapping her from head to foot, and the long tangle of her brown hair falling in dusky coils to her waist. She neither turned nor spoke as her sister entered the room. Margaret went up to her, and encircling her waist with one arm, drew the unresisting figure closer to her own, and said, "Why did you call me, dear? Are you not well?"

Beatrice slid her arms round her sister's neck, and drawing Margaret's ear close to her mouth, shyly whispered, "Somebody that you know has asked me to be his wife."

Margaret could not resist a start of surprise. "Not Hugh Randolph?" she exclaimed eagerly, bending down to peer into the face that was hidden on her shoulder, and which would not let itself be seen.

Trix's only answer was a fervent pressure with the encircling arms.

"Oh, my darling, how happy you have made me!" exclaimed Margaret, between laughing and crying—"how very, very happy!" She was going to thank Heaven, but next moment her heart shrank within her as she remembered by what means she had assisted in bringing about this fulfilment of her dearest wishes.

The summer moonlight was streaming full into the room, filling it with fantastic lights and shadows; and in the shrubbery outside the trees were whispering their leafy secrets, and seemed to be rejoicing together over the rain. Margaret sat down in an easy chair and Trix crouched at her knees, keeping her face turned persistently from the window; for she had thrown her mask aside now and fancied, foolish child! that her blushes and changes of countenance could be seen by that dim light.

"And what answer did you make him, dear?" said Margaret at length, when the full measure of her joy had in some degree toned itself down.

"I hardly know what I said," answered Trix. "A great deal of nonsense, I dare say. But I gave him to understand that his offer had taken me quite by surprise, and that I must have time to consult you in the matter, and to think it seriously over by myself; and that I would give him a decisive answer by Saturday at the latest."

"Oh!" said Margaret, with a little severity of tone.

"You know, Madge," said Beatrice, apologetically, "I had never looked on him in that light, merely regarding him as a friend; and I couldn't accept him off-hand without being certain that I could really love him."

"To be sure not, child. Very thoughtful on your part. But what is our ultimatum likely to be?"

"Really, Margery, that is more than I can tell at present. It is only three hours since the offer was made me, and a woman's mind, you know, dear, 'takes a long time making up.'"

"Hardly, in such a case as the present, I should think."

"I'm not so certain of that. But, in any case, why should I not have the privilege of hesitation? It is one of the rights of our sex. In the very act of doubting there is something delicious to the feminine mind. You say my news has made you very happy. Why has it done so?"

"Because, dear, Dr. Hugh Randolph is a man whom everybody likes and respects, your sister included; because he is a man in whose love any reasonable woman might be proud to find her happiness, and because I would infinitely prefer that you should wed this true and honest gentleman than that you should pass your life as a teacher in this and similar establishments, and find yourself left at last, in a lonely old age, without a soul in the world to care for you."

"But you would not have me marry Dr. Randolph unless I could feel towards him as a wife ought to feel towards her husband?"

"Certainly not," said Margaret emphatically. "Marry him, and him only, be he prince or peasant, to whom with loyal heart you can give the full treasure of your love; and I have yet to learn that you cannot so endow Hugh Randolph."

"And I have yet to learn that I can," said Trix saucily.

"To become the wife of a poor country surgeon would hardly satisfy your ambition, I suppose?"

"My ambition, at present, does not lie in the way of marriage at all. I have always looked forward to living with you, Meg, and to our spending many happy years together."

Margaret stroked the brown hair fondly. "Then, I suppose we must give the good doctor his *congé*?" she said, as if coming round to her sister's views, but in reality more determined than ever to carry her own point.

"I have certainly not decided to do anything of the kind," said Trix hastily. "I have one, two, three, four days before me, in which to make up my mind whether I shall say yes or no. Sweet little words, both of them, are they not? But there is a terrible significance about one of the two that makes me shudder when I think of saying it."

For more than an hour longer the sisters sat together in the moonlight, talking over this event, so important to both of them. But Margaret wisely refrained from any further pressing of her own views, not choosing that Beatrice should think that the decision at which she would have to arrive had been influenced in the slightest degree from without; while quite aware that the opinion which she, Margaret, had already expressed in the matter would not be without its weight in the scale of her sister's judgment, although Beatrice herself might probably be ignorant of the fact. There was a certain element of wilfulness in the composition of Beatrice which Margaret was obliged to consider in her calculations: the game had reached a point at which it could be won only by finessing; downright bold play would spoil everything.

"And now to bed," said Margaret at last, "or you will be good for nothing in the morning."

"She must—she must accept him!" muttered Margaret to herself, as she drew down the blinds and shut out the shivering dawn.

"Only one day more after to-day," said Beatrice dolefully, as she dawdled next morning over her late breakfast, "and then our slavery will begin; then it will be nothing but work, work, work, from morning till night."

"Even so," said Margaret quietly. "Such is our doom. But we will see whether to-day cannot afford us a little quiet pleasure after yesterday's dissipation. Mrs. Cardale's basket-phæton will be here at twelve, and I intend driving you and myself over to White Towers, the seat of Lord Borrowash, and one of the show-places of the county. So you will, perhaps, be good enough, Miss Lazy, to finish your breakfast without further delay."

"You dear, kind soul!" cried Trix the impulsive, starting up and hugging her sister. "I won't take more than a quarter of an hour for dressing, and you shan't have to wait for me at all to-day; and if we see old Lord Borrowash, I shall do my best to captivate him. My new brown feather will take his heart by storm, provided he still retain such a superfluity."

The basket-phæton was at the door at twelve precisely, and after a delay of ten minutes Trix declared herself ready, and took her place by her sister's side. She was more subdued than usual to-day, and talked very little all the way as they went. Leaving the pony and phæton at a little inn outside the gates, they walked through the park and by-and-bye were admitted, with a number of other visitors, into the house. Margaret had come chiefly to see the pictures, and could have lingered among them for days; but Beatrice looked on everything with an absent mind, and her sister took care not to break upon her mood. The house was chilly, and they were glad to get out into the sunny park again, where they rambled about for another hour and then went back to the little inn and had a rustic tea. After tea, they dawdled about the village, and went into the churchyard and read the quaint old epitaphs on the tombstones, several of which Margaret copied; and then back home in the dewy twilight. It was nearly dark when they reached Irongate House, and Margaret, as soon as she had taken off her things, sat down to the piano. The same subdued manner was still upon Beatrice, and, although Hugh Randolph's name had not been mentioned all day, it was not difficult to tell on what subject her thoughts were running. Trix was very fond of listening to Margaret's playing, as the latter was quite aware, and to-night she played her very best. She wanted to melt her sister's silent mood and charm it into words, for she began to fear that so much intense brooding might end disastrously for her scheme. Margaret took no note of time when she was playing; how long she had been at the piano she did not know; she knew only that for

some time the room had been quite dark, when she felt a hand laid softly on her shoulder, and heard a voice murmur in her ear—"The answer is, 'Yes.'"

Margaret turned to look, but the flutter of a white skirt in the moonlight was all that she saw, as Beatrice rushed like a startled fawn from the room. Margaret kept on playing for half an hour longer, and then went up to bed. After putting out her light, she stole into her sister's room. Trix heard her coming and feigned to be asleep. Margaret listened for a few seconds to her sister's regular breathing and then, stooping over her, imprinted a kiss on her forehead and murmured a few words whose import Beatrice could not catch. Then she went back to her own room.

"I have made Margery happy by saying yes, and that is something," said Trix to herself, opening wide her eyes as soon as Margaret had left the room. "How eager she is that I should marry Dr. Randolph!—far more eager than I am. I don't understand it at all. I suppose it would never do to recall that dreadful little word. I feel half inclined to do so; but, in that case, I suppose Margery would never forgive me. I did not want to marry anybody just yet—at least, I hardly know whether I did or not; and then, he was so earnest and tender that it was nearly impossible to resist him; and so—and so it's perhaps all for the best; and I think I'll go to sleep. I'm glad I've made Margery happy."

As soon as breakfast was over next morning, Margaret despatched a note to Dr. Randolph, just a single line, asking him to come up in the evening to Irongate House, if his engagements would allow of his doing so. The Doctor replied that he would be up by seven o'clock, should nothing unforeseen occur to prevent him. Margaret tossed the note to her sister.

"Oh, Margery! what have you done?" exclaimed Beatrice, all aflame with blushes.

"Merely asked Mr. Randolph to come up this evening, that he may hear his good fortune from your own lips."

"But I did not want him to know anything about his good fortune, as you call it, till Saturday. It was only the day before yesterday that he spoke to me; and it looks like jumping at his offer to tell him so soon afterwards that he is accepted."

"Such nonsense, child! Learn to have a better opinion of your future husband. No such vulgar thought would ever enter the head of Hugh Randolph. Besides, if you love him, why not tell him so at once, and put an end to the poor fellow's misery?"

Margaret was busy all day assisting Miss Easterbrook with her arrangements for the return of the pupils. There was about her this morning an elasticity, a brightness, a gay sunny humour, which had been foreign to her for so long a time that even Miss Easterbrook did not fail to notice it, and congratulated Miss Davenant on her good spirits and improved health.

At seven o'clock to the minute Dr. Hugh Randolph rang the gate-bell of Irongate House. Margaret met him in the shrubbery. Instead of taking him in by the front door, she led him round the side of the house to the French window of her own sitting-room, but without saying a word to him that could satisfy either his hopes or fears. "Enter," she said, pushing open the window; "and do not forget the old proverb—Faint hearts are of little use in this world; and he that woos boldly, woos best of all. I give you half-an-hour to yourselves; at the end of that time I shall expect you, sir, to join me in the garden, and to hear that you have been successful."

Hugh Randolph stepped into the room, rather timidly, it must be confessed. Margaret shut the window behind him, and then betook herself to her favourite walk at the lower end of the shrubbery—a small space of ground, bounded on one side by a high wall and a narrow border of flowers, and on the other by thick clumps of laurel, and—which constituted its special attraction in the eyes of Margaret—not overlooked by even one of the many windows of Irongate House. For a long half-hour she paced slowly from end to end of this sheltered nook, joy in her heart and brightness in her eye—for had not her scheme succeeded?

At length she saw Hugh and Beatrice coming arm-in-arm through the shrubbery to look for her, and she stopped at the end of the alley to watch them. As usual, she was dressed in black silk, and had on, this evening, a white summer shawl, one corner of which she had drawn over her head to protect her from the evening damps, holding it with thumb and forefinger under her chin. As she stood thus, with her delicate aquiline face peering, white-hooded, from among the laurels, an artist's eye would have seen something worth carrying away for embodiment in a future picture.

"A handsome pair, and as good as they are handsome," she said to herself. "They little dream of the bright future in store for them. Will it spoil them and make them worldly-wise, I wonder, and forgetful of old friends, as good fortune so often does? No; I think Hugh Randolph has a heart that neither good nor bad fortune could spoil utterly; and Trix I can answer for."

"A love affair in Irongate House, and I not know of it!" exclaimed Miss Easterbrook when, later in the evening, Margaret went into her room and told her of Trix's engagement. "Where have my eyes been all this time, that I never so much as suspected such a thing? I knew that nice sister of yours would not stay with us long. And Dr. Randolph, of all men in the world! Miss Beatrice might perhaps have found a richer man for a husband, but nowhere a worthier one; and so I shall tell her in the morning when I congratulate her. And as for him, he will have the prettiest wife in all Helsingham. How charming she would look, costumed as a shepherdess and done in Dresden or Sèvres ware!"

CHAPTER XXI.

BREAKING THE NEWS.

NEXT morning Margaret wrote a short note to her father, informing him of Trix's engagement, and in due time came his approval of the same.

On the part of Hugh Randolph, there were two people to whom he deemed it necessary to break in person the news of his engagement. The two individuals in question were Mrs. Sutton, his mother's old friend, of whom brief mention has been already made, and Charlotte Herne.

When he reached home from Irongate House on Thursday evening—the evening of his acceptance—he was not sorry to find that Charlotte had retired for the night. He was hardly prepared just yet with his confession. He wanted to be alone; he wanted to familiarize himself, in some measure, with this new happiness which had flooded his life so suddenly, and which threatened to sweep away so many of the old landmarks on which his eyes had rested for years; but at present he could not speak of it to any one. Next day he was more than usually busy; and now Saturday night had come, and no word had yet been spoken. It would be useless to delay the confession any longer; what he had got to say had better be said at once; but in spite of himself his heart shrank a little at the task before him.

Mrs. Sutton lived on the opposite side of the market-place, and about half-past nine on the Saturday evening Hugh walked over to her house. As usual, she was busy with her knitting, but none the less had she an eye for everything that was going forward in the lamp-lighted room. She watched Peggy, her old servant, lay the cloth and complete the preparations for the little bit of hot supper which would be brought up the moment her knitting was put away. Then her eyes wandered critically round the room, as they had done twenty times already, to note whether the extra scrubbing and scouring, consequent on its being Saturday and the end of the week, had been done to her mind. To see that the grate had been thoroughly polished, that the carpet had been carefully swept, and that no hole or corner had been left unvisited by the duster of the rather flighty young person who acted as Peggy's subordinate, and who was inclined to consider both Mrs. Sutton and her old servant as "mighty particular," and very difficult to please.

It was only on Saturday nights that Mrs. Sutton indulged in the luxury of a hot supper; on other evenings she never thought of such a thing, and would, indeed, have considered it a piece of reckless extravagance not to be tolerated in an economical household, to have gone to such an expense more frequently than once a week. As it was, these hot suppers never agreed with her; her sleep was never so sound and refreshing after them as on other nights; but she had

been accustomed to have them for years ; her husband had always been fond of the Saturday night festivals, and they had become so associated in her memory with old times and old faces she would never see again, that to give them up would have dissevered her from much that custom had rendered dear, and the week would have seemed to lack its proper and fitting conclusion.

"Aunty, I've come to have a bit of supper with you to-night," said Hugh, as he entered the room.

"You're right welcome, lad," she answered, giving him a bony hand to shake. "But don't you know," she added, more drily, "that my medical man says hot suppers are anything but good for me? And what's bad for one must be bad for another, you know, eh?"

"I should like to argue that point with you," said Hugh. "Forget, to-night, that I am your doctor, and look on me only as your friend's son."

"There's something on his mind that he wants to confess," said the old lady to herself, rubbing her nose with the point of her needle. Just then the clock struck ten ; so, with a little sigh, she put away her knitting and turned to the table.

"You have said more than once, Aunty, that you would like to see me comfortably married," said Hugh, with a headlong plunge. "Are you still of the same mind?"

"I am, Hugh. I've said it ; and what I've said, I'll stick to. I should like to see you comfortably married to a nice, sensible girl, with a bit of money of her own."

"That's all right, then—except, perhaps, as regards the money ; and I may as well tell you everything without further preface. Aunty, I *am* going to be married."

Mrs. Sutton's knife and fork dropped from her paralysed fingers ; her spectacles slid slowly down her nose and fell into the gravy in her plate. For a moment she stared blankly across the table at Hugh, and then she said, in a weak, quavering voice, very different from her usual sharp, clear way of speaking—

"Eh, lad, but I don't think I rightly understood what you said !"

"I said that I was going to get married, Aunty," said Hugh, very gently.

"Oh !"

"You are not angry with me, are you?"

"Angry with you, Hugh Randolph ! No—why should I be angry?" said the old lady, trying in vain to conceal her discomposure.

"You are your own master ; free to come and go ; free to get married if you think well to do so ; why should I be angry?"

"If you are not angry, Aunty, you are not glad, as I thought you would be."

"And why ought I to be glad, I should like to know? Glad to find there are two more fools in the world—is that what you mean?"

"Oh, well, Aunty, if you choose to look at the matter in that light,

I have nothing further to say," replied Hugh, with a smile; "except this, that when you come to know the young lady, I am sure that you will like her and approve my choice."

"Every young fellow that's going to get wedded thinks the same; but we old folk don't see things through rose-coloured spectacles."

"Have you no curiosity to hear her name?"

"Not much, Hugh. Young women, nowadays, are all pretty much of a muchness; I'd not give twopence extra to have the pick of 'em."

"It would not do for everybody to see with your eyes, or we should have very few marriages, I'm afraid."

"If it's Miss Parkinson that you have been making up to, I sha'n't so much care. There's not a nicer girl going, to my thinking, than Maria Parkinson."

"Tastes differ in these matters, as in everything else," said Hugh. "The lady who has honoured me by promising to become my wife is Miss Beatrice Davenant, a younger sister of Miss Davenant, of Irongate House."

"No, Hugh, don't say that!" cried the old lady pitifully; "don't tell me that you have asked that fizmygig, fly-away hussy, who has lived in France half her life, and has no fortune but the red and white in her cheeks, to be your wife! Don't tell me that!"

"What I have told you is quite true, Aunt. Miss Beatrice Davenant, and no one but her, will become my wife; and you will therefore understand that it cannot be pleasant to me to hear her spoken of by anyone except with proper respect."

"Nay lad, nobody's fine feelings shall stop Mary Sutton's tongue! I'll speak my mind, let what will come of it. And I must say, that I gave my old friend's son credit for more sense in choosing a wife, than to think he would go and pick up with that namby-pamby wax doll at Irongate House, who hasn't a shilling in the world to call her own—(Mrs. Sloane told me all about her, and her carryings on at the picnic, and how she made eyes at every young man that took the least notice of her)—when there's so many bonny Helsingham lasses, sensible and well-to-do, who wouldn't have said 'No,' if you had asked them. Eh, dear, dear, what would poor Betsy Randolph say if she were alive now and knew of her son's folly!"

Here the old lady's voice quavered and broke down. She rose from her chair, and then paused for a moment to fumble for her handkerchief and wipe her eyes.

"And now I think I'll go to bed," she said. "Will you ring the bell, please, for Peggy? Thank you. No, don't come any nearer me, Hugh Randolph, for I have no patience with you—none at all. No, I don't want any more supper, thank you. I've no appetite for suppers, after what you have told me. Good night—good night! Eh, but your poor mother would have almost broken her heart over such a misfortune! But some men are born fools, and can't help themselves."

She was moving slowly and laboriously across the floor towards her own room as she launched these parting shafts at Hugh. He sank back despondently in his chair when she repulsed his proffered assistance so curtly, and he continued to sit there after she had left the room. He heard Peggy come upstairs, he heard the muffled voices of the two as they talked together; the faint sound of Mrs. Sutton's dry, crackling cough came to him through the closed door, and then the door was opened and Peggy called him softly, "Mr. Hugh, Mr. Hugh," and he hastened to obey the summons.

He found Mrs. Sutton seated in an easy-chair—a grim, gaunt figure, attired in a white dressing-robe and a voluminous black shawl, with a night-cap on her head that was worthy of the name. "Shake hands, boy," she said, "and let us part in peace, for at my age one never knows what a night may bring forth. I was, maybe, too hasty in what I said just now," she went on when Hugh had complied with her request. "I had no call, perhaps, to say such harsh things about this young lady, for I know nothing concerning her beyond what Mrs. Sloane told me, and I never set much value by *her* opinions. But the news came on me so sudden, like; and then I had so set my mind on your some day wedding Maria Parkinson, that when you told me it was somebody else I quite lost my head for a minute or two and hardly knew what I said. But if your heart is so strongly drawn towards this Miss Davenant, marry her, Hugh, my boy, by all means; and if you prove as good a husband to her as you were a son to my dear dead friend, she won't have much to complain of."

"You must try to love Beatrice a little bit for my sake; by-and-by you will learn to love her a great deal for *her* own."

"It may be so, Hugh, and I hope it will be, but we old folk don't learn to love very easily. Anyhow, let this young lady come and spend a day with me some time before long, and I'll do my best to like her—yes, my very best. I dare say, now, she'll think me an old-fashioned fright, even if she doesn't call me one."

"I am positive that no such thought would ever enter her head."

"Simpleton! A deal you know about it. Girls don't tell their sweethearts half they think, knowing very well they would never turn them into husbands if they did."

There still remained Charlotte to be told.

CHAPTER XXII.

TELLING CHARLOTTE.

THE town clock was striking eleven as Hugh crossed the market-place on his way home. He found Charlotte in the unlighted drawing-room, coiled up on a large cushion before the fire in a cat-like attitude, to which she was much addicted; for even in the height of

summer, whenever the weather was at all cold and rainy, as it had been for the last day or two, Charlotte had fires lighted in such of the rooms as were frequented by her. She started up as Hugh stooped and pinched one of her ears, while over her face there crept one of those soft, winning, child-like smiles, which seemed to offer such a flat contradiction to some of the darker traits of her character. "He has come at last," she murmured to herself, as Hugh stepped into the next room to wash his hands, "and my heart beats as though I had not heard his footfall for a year. By the same token I know that I love him. Oh, my darling! my darling! if I could but clasp you to this heart, and keep you there as my own for ever!"

A month had passed since Charlotte's double discovery—that her sight was coming back to her, and that her hair had turned grey without her knowledge; and her mind had, by this time, become sufficiently familiarised with both these facts for her to go about her ordinary avocations in her ordinary way, and without giving rise to the least suspicion, even on the part of those who knew her best, that she differed in any way from the Charlotte of six months ago. Her eyes were strengthening slowly but surely, although as yet she could see nothing clearly, a person standing between her and the light seeming nothing more than a dull, black blotch, featureless and vague of outline: but even this to her was a great gain, and the improvement was still going on. But, as before stated, she guarded her precious secret jealously, and from no one more so than from her cousin Hugh. The agony of grief and shame into which she had fallen on discovering the changed colour of her hair, had, from its very intensity, worn itself away, leaving only a dull, numb sense as of some great misfortune, that seldom left her either by night or day. Latterly, however, she had taken some small comfort to herself, from the fact that upstairs, carefully put away in her own private cupboard, was a bottle of *The Magical Oil of the Sahara*, of which precious compound (so said the label) a few applications were warranted to restore to the greyest hair the natural gloss and colour of youth, as was proved by "thousands of testimonials from all parts of the world." For this stuff Charlotte had paid an old hag, with whom she now and then had secret dealings, the sum of two sovereigns; and on its efficacy and ability to do that which it promised all Charlotte's hopes were now built. She was waiting to try it till her sight should be sufficiently restored to enable her to do so without the assistance of anyone. Poor child! when the proper moment for her experiment should have happily arrived, she wanted the world to believe that to the beneficence of Nature alone was due the restoration of sight to her eyes and colour to her hair.

"Basking before the fire as usual," said Hugh cheerily as he came into the room. "What a starved creature it is!"

"Even kittens can scratch, sir; and I advise you to be more careful what you say. Shall I order your Highness a *fricassee* of

young mice for supper? You have no idea how tender they are!"

"Wretch! do you take me for the Marquis of Carrabas? Not another morsel shall pass these abstemious lips till to-morrow morning."

"What, more letters!" he added, tossing over two or three epistles that lay on the table as the servant brought in a lighted lamp. "'The cry is, still they come.' At this rate I shall want a private secretary before long. How would the post suit you, Charley?"

"Oh, admirably! Only wait till I shall have my new spectacles for making the blind see, the invention of the celebrated Dr. Phosco-boscophornio. You haven't heard of them? That's just like your ignorance."

She had been hunting about in one of the cabinet drawers, and she now came up to Hugh with a cigar and a match. "Is one permitted to smoke here?" he asked, pausing in the act of opening one of his letters.

"*Oui, monsieur*," answered Charlotte; "provided you do it only now and then."

Hugh lighted his cigar, and then skimmed through his letters in an indifferent, absent-minded way. Charlotte went and ensconced herself in one of the old-fashioned window-seats behind the half-drawn curtains, a position where the semi-obscurity was grateful to her eyes.

"You have not heard from your London correspondent, have you, Hugh," she asked, "since you had that letter on my birthday?"

"If you mean Cornthwaite, I have not heard from him."

"I don't think you ever will hear from him again, Hugh."

"You don't know Cornthwaite, or you would not make such a remark. He is one of the sleuth hounds of policedom, slow and sure, and rarely at fault. Let him but once strike the trail of his quarry, and he will follow it up with a sagacity that to the uninitiated seems little less than marvellous."

"For all that," said Charlotte, "it's my belief that you will never hear anything more of *her*. I question greatly whether she is in London at all. Were you not merely led away by your own fancy, when you thought you saw her face in the crowd, now more than a year ago?"

Hugh shook his head dissentingly. "No," he said, "I saw her as plainly as ever I saw anyone in my life. She, too, saw me, and I shall never forget the look that came into her face when her eyes met mine across the crowd. But next minute, when I forced my way through the crush to the very spot where I had seen her standing, she had vanished as mysteriously as if the earth had opened at her feet and swallowed her up."

"Which merely goes to confirm what I said just now, that you were misled by your own fancy."

"No, Charley, I cannot accept your theory," he said. "I had information from another quarter, as you know, that she had been seen on board the English steamer at Dieppe; and where would she be so likely to go as to London, where there was nobody that knew her history and no familiar faces to remind her of what she once had been?"

"Heaven help her, wherever she may be!" said Charlotte fervently.

"I am not without hope that Cornthwaite may even yet succeed in tracing her," went on Hugh. "You know my object, Charley, in trying to find her?"

"I do; and it is just like you to still go on hoping when ninety-nine men out of every hundred would have given up the case in despair long ago. How calmly you talk of it all now! To hear you tell the story, no one would imagine that you had been one of the chief actors in it."

"There was a time when I thought I should never recover from the blow; and now, as you say, I can bear to speak of it as calmly as though I had been a mere spectator of the drama. That like often cures like is a maxim well known to us doctors; and the rule holds good in other things besides medicine."

The rings of the curtain rattled as Charlotte moved uneasily on her seat. "I don't understand what you mean, Cousin Hugh," she said, with a little tremor in her voice.

Hugh puffed away in silence for a little while before he spoke. Then he said, "Charley, do you believe in second love?"

The blind girl's heart gave a great leap, and then seemed to stop beating. She pressed her hand to her bosom, and caught her breath rapidly. Had the moment for which she had longed and prayed with all the strength of her burning, passionate nature come at last? No, no! it was too great, too intense a happiness for a poor, sightless creature like her! And yet—and yet how otherwise could his words be interpreted?

"What a strange question, Hugh!" she said, with a little tremulous laugh. "How can you expect an ignorant, shut-up creature like me to be learned in such matters?"

"In the Court of Love all your sex are special pleaders as of right. The fine instinct of a woman in affairs of the heart is always to be trusted before the common-sense experience of a man. I repeat my question, Charley: do you believe in second love?"

"In certain cases, yes. Where a person's affections have been repulsed or cruelly trampled on; where love has been rewarded by deception or ingratitude; I certainly see no reason why the life of anyone so treated should be rendered miserable for ever. The world is wide, and hearts that are both loving and true are by no means so scarce as some people would have us believe."

"Very fairly argued," said Hugh. "Now for the application. Hem! I myself, Charley—in fact—that is to say—I have decided

to try the efficacy of second love in my own case. How I have fared once already you know as well as I do ; and yet, like a bold mariner, I am going to venture my little all again."

"Oh, Hugh!" She wanted a moment to recover herself. How fast her heart was beating, and how dry and parched her throat was! Why did he not throw away his cigar, and come and put his arms round her and kiss her? But men are so cold and hard, they don't know how to love.

"Yes, Charley," went on Hugh, "not content with burning my fingers once, I must needs put them into the fire a second time. Well, child, have you nothing to say?"

"Does the—does the lady return your affection?"

"Well—hum—yes, I have some reason to believe that she does."

Some reason to believe so! How cruel of him to go on torturing her by this assumption of indifference. But he would—he must—throw off the mask in a little while, and clasp her to his heart, and pour into her ear the sweet poem of his love. "Oh, darling! darling! why do you not come to me!" Scarcely could she repress the wild cry of her poor, passion-tossed heart.

"What a strange girl you are, Charley! Have you no wish to hear the lady's name?"

"Oh yes, do please tell me her name, Hugh! Really and truly I am very anxious to hear it."

He was so wrapt up in his own self-complacency that he did not detect the strange nervous ring of her voice. "Her name is Beatrice Davenant—a pretty name, is it not? She is a younger sister of Miss Davenant, of Irongate House. You remember me speaking about Miss Davenant several times, don't you, Charley? Why don't you answer me? What a strange mood you are in to-night! Charley, I say!" But no Charley answered. "You minx! I'll pay you out for this!" he said, thinking she was playing him a trick; and taking up the lamp, he crossed the room, and drew back the curtain behind which Charlotte was hidden. "Heavens! the child has fainted." He took her up in his arms and carried her to the sofa, and rang the bell for some water, and unfastened the top buttons of her dress. As he did so, the little locket he had given her on her birthday slipped out of its hiding-place. "What a loving little soul she is—so good and true-hearted!" he murmured to himself. "What made her faint, I wonder? Poor little thing! she is far from strong, and will never live to be an old woman, I fear." He was as utterly unsuspecting of the real state of Charlotte's feelings as though she had been his sister in reality.

Presently Charlotte gave a long sobbing sigh, and opened wide her blue-grey eyes; but the tender orbs were dazzled by the lamplight, and she closed them again with a look of pain. Hugh motioned to a servant standing near, who turned down the lamp till only a soft yellow twilight shone through the room.

"Is that you, Cousin Hugh?" said Charlotte, stretching out her hand to feel for him.

"Who else should it be, dear?" he replied, as he took her hand and chafed it between his own. "Smell these salts for a little while; they will refresh you. How cold you are! We must get you to bed as soon as possible. Why did you not tell me that you were ill?"

"I am not ill, Hugh."

"What then, Miss Contradiction?"

"Only weary."

"Weary of what?"

"Of everything—of my life!"

"That will never do, Charley. I thought you had too much good sense in that little noddle of yours to find room for such ridiculous ideas. The fact is, you are becoming nervous and low-spirited, through moping so much in the house. We must get you out more into the fresh air and sunshine, and send you to the seaside for a couple of months. Those are the remedies I prescribe, together with a few of those delicious mixtures for the composition of which I am so deservedly famed. But now, to bed. Come, let me carry you there, as I used to do years ago when you were a child, and I a great hulking hobbledohoy. *Allons, ma mignonne!* Your arms round my neck, so. Susan, do you go before with the light."

She put her arms languidly round his neck, and let her head rest wearily on his shoulder, while he carried her upstairs as lightly and easily as though she were a child of thirteen. That brief journey up to bed thrilled her with a strange exquisite sense of mingled pleasure and pain: of pleasure the most intense, at feeling herself encircled by those protecting arms; at being enfolded, as it were, to his bosom, though for ever so short a time: of pain the sharpest, at feeling and knowing that never more, in all the time to come, would such happiness be hers again. Never more! and she loved him so passionately. Soon another head would rest as of right where hers was nestling now—soon—. Oh, why, why had she not died? How could she ever bear to live through all the misery to come?

As they were going up the second flight of stairs, Charlotte whispered in Hugh's ear: "And you are really going to be married, Hugh?"

"I hope so, Charley, and that before I am many weeks older. But bear this in mind, dear," he added, "that your home, now and ever is beneath this roof. My marriage will make no difference to you in that respect, nor, indeed, in any other, except that then you will not want for pleasant society as you do now. You can't long know Beatrice Davenant without learning to love her. Shivering again, I declare! This sort of thing won't do at all."

He carried her into her own sitting-room and laid her gently on the sofa. "Here we are at last," he said. "Susan will stay and help you into bed, and I will make you up a draught to be taken at

once. Don't get up in the morning till I have seen you and given you permission ; and now, good-night, dear, and if my prophecy is worth anything, you will be considerably better in the morning. But don't forget the draught."

He stooped and pressed his lips to her forehead, and was gone.

"For the last time, oh, my poor heart ! for the last time," murmured the blind girl to herself, as she listened to Hugh's receding footsteps. "His kisses now belong to another ; I shall never again feel the pressure of his lips : never again !"

Then she let Susan undress her and put her to bed, and after that she took the draught which Hugh sent up for her.

"Leave the light burning ; it will be like company for me," she said to Susan. Then Susan went, closing the door behind her. Five minutes later an intense drowsiness crept over Charlotte, her troubles slipped away from her for a little time and she fell into a sleep, deep and calm, that was unbroken till late the following morning.

Hugh came up to see her before going his rounds, and pronounced her better, and gave her permission to get up should she feel so disposed. But Charlotte did not feel so disposed. All that day she lay in bed, thinking, thinking, thinking. She was waited upon by the assiduous Susan, but beyond a little wine-and-water now and then, or a few grapes, nothing passed her lips between sunrise and sunset. But when the day was darkening to its close she told Susan that she should not want her any more till morning, and bolted the door behind her, and so secured herself from further intrusion. Then, from one of the many little drawers in an open cabinet that stood in one corner of her sitting-room, she took a box of opium pills, which she had purloined from Hugh's surgery downstairs, a room in which Charlotte, from long experience, was quite at home, having spent many a pleasant hour there with Hugh, while he was mixing his draughts or manufacturing his pills ; and in which, blind though she was, she could have found almost any drug or medicament on the shelves, having learnt to distinguish them by their smell. Neither was she wanting in a knowledge of the properties of many of them, thanks to her own inquisitiveness and to Hugh's good nature in answering her questions.

Having swallowed a couple of the pills, Charlotte got into bed again, and in a little while was fast asleep. She slept till the clock was just on the stroke of one, and then she awoke suddenly and completely. For a quarter of an hour after she awoke she lay as still and moveless, except for her breathing, as one dead. Then she got out of bed stealthily and swiftly, and going to the same oaken cabinet from which she had taken the box of pills, she took from another drawer a lancet, which had formerly been her father's, together with a small, old-fashioned china mug, which had been a birthday present to herself when quite a child. From her writing-desk she next produced a sheet of note paper and a new quill pen ; for

Charlotte, assisted by an apparatus for the use of blind people, wrote occasionally to the one or two old schoolfellows with whom she cared to keep up a correspondence. The night was dark and starless, with a dull moaning wind that blew dimly in hollow gusts around the old house. But light or dark was all as one to Charlotte, who would often frisk and dance and sing about her own rooms during the uncanny small hours in a way that would have considerably astonished her cousin Hugh, had he ever caught her when thus on the wing.

Taking the lancet, the china mug, the note paper and the quill pen, Charlotte seated herself at the table, and having rolled up the sleeve of her night-dress, she deliberately proceeded to puncture herself in the arm between the elbow and the shoulder. The blood came freely, and fell, drop by drop, into the china mug which she held to receive it. Her white, sharp little teeth were firmly locked, and all her features were set and stony; but not a nerve in her body quivered, and her heart beat evenly and calmly. When satisfied that her arm had bled sufficiently for her purpose, by means of her disengaged hand and her teeth she bound it up firmly with her handkerchief. Then spreading out the paper before her, she dipped her pen into the mug and wrote the following words in crimson letters, that were large and irregular, but legible to any one who could read at all:

"I WILL KILL HER!

"I SWEAR IT!

"CHARLOTTE.

"*Aug. 5th.*"

When the words were written she put down the pen, and sat very quietly waiting for them to dry. Then she folded the paper into a small compass and tied it up with a couple of long hairs plucked from her head. Then taking it in her hand, she went out of her sitting-room and up the stairs that led from the landing outside, and so into the loft at the top of the house, of which mention has been already made. The skeleton, invisible in the dark, was still keeping watch and ward, like a sentinel in his box, at the entrance to the loft. Charlotte felt for him, and grasped his bony hand as soon as she found herself in the room. "Good-morrow, Monsieur le Capitaine," she said. "I have a little matter here which I wish to entrust to your keeping. You never tell tales, I know: so secret and confidential!"

Finding herself not tall enough to carry out the purpose she had in view, she fetched a chair from another part of the loft, and having mounted it, she proceeded to hide away the paper on which she had written in one of the orifices of the grinning skull before her. "You will never tell, will you, my dear captain?" she said, with that little cold-blooded laugh in which she rarely indulged except when alone.

"What a funny darling you are!" she added. "Too thin to be altogether handsome, you know; but still with something *distingué* about you, and entirely unconventional. If you could but come out into the open and have a waltz with me, how delightful that would be! But perhaps you are above such frivolities, and very proper too for a gentleman of position, such as you are. You are, however, far too good-natured to object to your poor Charlotte making a teetotum of herself for a little while. I am so light-hearted to-night that I must dance, or I think I shall go mad."

Having found the musical-box, she proceeded to wind it up, and as soon as it began to play she put it down in the middle of the floor. The air it played was one of the Elfin waltzes, and Charlotte, with the trailing skirts of her night-dress held daintily up between thumb and finger, so that they could not impede her movements, began to gyrate round the room in time with the music.

"What a heavenly waltz!" she murmured. "My soul seems to languish and die within me as I listen. If Hugh could see me now, he would think his house was haunted by a ghost that had lost its wits. Oh, for a partner, were it only a will-o'-the-wisp!"

Susan, the housemaid, in her chamber below, waking some time during the dark hours, heard the faint echo of Charlotte's witch-like laughter, and shuddered as she heard. "If anybody was ever in league with the devil, that girl is!" she muttered; and then she buried her head under the clothes to shut out the unholy sound.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN GOOD SOCIETY.

THE Midsummer vacation at Irongate House was over; teachers and pupils alike had returned to their duties; but Beatrice Davenant took no part in the busy scene beyond that of a looker-on. Miss Easterbrook had insisted that she should remain at Irongate House as a guest, and not as a teacher, during the short time that would elapse before her marriage, so that none of the Helsingham busy-bodies need know that it had ever been intended that she should become an assistant in the school—a little act of diplomacy on the part of Miss Easterbrook to secure Beatrice at starting as good a position as possible in the small but somewhat exclusive circles of Helsingham society. No one, indeed, could have entered more warmly into every phase of the affair than did the worthy school-mistress, urging Margaret into setting about the preparations for Trix's wardrobe without delay, and claiming for herself the privilege of presenting the bride with her wedding outfit.

Mrs. Cardale, with whom Trix was a great favourite, had promised to attend the wedding; but a few days after the commencement of

term she called at Irongate House to inform Margaret that circumstances had put it out of her power to do so. "I have just received a letter from my aunt, Mrs. Stewart, who has been staying at Pau for some time," she said. "She and I have not been on intimate terms for several years; but now that she either is or fancies herself to be slowly dying, she has written me a kind and loving epistle, pressing me earnestly to go to her with as little delay as possible. I have no choice but to accede to her request; it is merely leaving England three months before my usual time for flight, and, as the case is, I shall hardly be back at Helsingham before spring. Robert has to go to London next Monday on business, and it is decided that I shall start with him. To be obliged to leave before the wedding is a real disappointment to me. All I can do under the circumstances is to insist on you and Beatrice coming to Brook Lodge and spending a day with me before I go. To-day is Wednesday. Will you come on Friday? Now, do promise. That will be the day of the flower-show, and we can all visit it together. I will send the brougham for you at eleven."

So it was arranged; and by half-past eleven on the forenoon of Friday, Margaret and Trix found themselves at Brook Lodge. In due time came luncheon, and when that was over they set out for the show, which was held in a pretty nook of Sandilands Park. The day was warm and sunny; the display of flowers was tolerably good; the town and country cliques mustered strongly, as on a common ground of vantage; and the inevitable brass band discoursed music that was more noisy than sweet. Mrs. Cardale found many acquaintances, to most of whom she introduced Miss Davenant and her sister; and before long numerous inquiries were fluttering about among the company on the lawn respecting the two sisters, whom the once-fashionable and still charming and exclusive Mrs. Cardale was chaperoning with such evident *empressement*. Mrs. Cardale, when introducing Margaret and Trix to any of her well-to-do friends, said nothing as to their humble position in the social scale, simply because she did not think it necessary to do so, and not from what would have seemed to many people a natural reluctance to venture on such a confession before so fashionable an audience; as was clearly proved a little later in the day, when Mrs. Cardale was joined by Mrs. Chillinghurst, of Pingley Dene, one of the county luminaries. The two ladies had been at school together a quarter of a century before, and the friendship between them had been of a texture stout enough to withstand the wear and tear of the world during all those years.

"By-the-bye, Henrietta," said the county lady, after a few inquiries respecting health and other private matters had passed to and fro, "who are those two sisters whom you introduced to me about an hour ago? and where do they come from? Nobody here seems to know them."

Mrs. Cardale answered her friend's inquiries as clearly and succinctly as possible.

"Ah, you always were a great collector of curiosities," remarked the other. "With your levelling, democratic tendencies, I think it a great pity that you did not live in the time of the first French Revolution. Then, you would have been appreciated; now, I am afraid the world will merely put you down as eccentric."

Mrs. Cardale smiled sweetly. "You are quite oracular to-day," she said. "You talk as one might fancy one of the figures out of 'Le Follet' would talk, were it alive; and are becoming as thoroughly artificial as the roses in your bonnet. And now that we have finished our compliments, let me hasten to tell you, before we are interrupted, that I want you to do me a very special favour."

"Command me in any way, Henrietta. I am entirely at your service."

"I know that, dear, or I would not ask you. Now listen attentively. I have already told you that the younger Miss Davenant is shortly to be married to Dr. Randolph, whom you know, if not personally, at least by reputation, as a very clever young surgeon. Now what I want you to do is to take the youthful Mrs. Randolph by the hand, and give her the benefit of your countenance and protection on her entrée into Helsingham society. I want you to give her a ticket for the Assembly, and also to invite her and her husband to dine once or twice at Pingley next winter. Will you do this for me, dear?"

"Really, Henrietta ——" began Mrs. Chillinghurst, and then she stopped. "The wife of a common country surgeon, you know! What would the county say?"

"You are strong enough and daring enough to defy the county, and to glory in the deed. You have only to write 'Maria Chillinghurst, her mark,' opposite the name of anyone; and, however humble and unknown to fame such a person may previously have been, she is from that moment gathered into the fold of the fashionable elect, and is thenceforth free of all its mysteries. But all this you know as well as I."

"But the wife of a common country surgeon, Henrietta! Consider. The difficulties would be very great, and a fiasco would render me ridiculous for ever."

"Look at that vulgar wife of Dr. Chubb. She goes everywhere."

"Yes, but you seem to forget that Dr. Chubb is physician to Lord Borrowash, and that goes for something. Besides, however vulgar Mrs. Chubb may be (and I am not going to deny her vulgarity), she comes of the Castle Wingfield family, a fact which carries with it a certain weight in society."

"I still repeat that you are strong enough, and daring enough, to do this, if you only choose to buckle on your armour for the fight. And think of the glories of victory! The girl herself will do you

no discredit. There is not a sweeter face here to-day ; her manners are naturally good ; and if she wants that last coat of varnish which contact with society alone can give, she has insight and adaptability, and you will find her a pupil of whom you will soon be very proud."

"What a pity she is not going to marry into a better position !"

"Perhaps so, in one sense ; but Dr. Randolph is a rising man, and his name will one day be widely known. Well—to be, or not to be?"

"Oh, I will do what I can, of course, since you make such a point of it. At the same time, I must tell you very plainly that the prospect is by no means a pleasing one to me."

When our three ladies got back to Brook Lodge, Mrs. Cardale found a note from her brother, in which he stated that he had been unexpectedly called from home, and should not be back in time for dinner, but as soon after as his business would allow of. So Mrs. Cardale and her guests dined cosily together, and very merrily too, despite the absence of Mr. Bruhn, who, however, reached home in time to join them over their tea in the drawing-room.

"Now is Robert himself again," said Mr. Bruhn, as he gave back his empty cup and saucer. "Yes, thank you, I will take another cup, only not quite so sweet this time. You didn't ask me to take any more, do you say? Then, I'm sure that was an oversight on your part, and my reply was given just the same as if you had asked me. Only a superior mind can appreciate the delicacy of my reproof for your forgetfulness. Miss Beatrice, here, looks quite mystified. I am afraid she is one of those worthy people who don't possess superior minds."

"You must not notice my brother's nonsense," said Mrs. Cardale, smilingly, to Trix. "Apparently he is in one of his ridiculous moods to-night. At such times his mind resembles what my friend Lady Parsons would call a 'rude unformed chaos,' and there is no accounting for either his sayings or doings. I wish he had been considerate enough to have dined at home to-day, knowing how much it was my desire that he should do so."

"Considerateness had nothing whatever to do with the matter," answered Mr. Bruhn. "I was called away on business that admitted of no delay. I regret that I was unable to reach home earlier ; but now that I am here, you ought, all of you, to make much of me, and strive your utmost to erase the disappointment from my memory."

"To hear you talk, Robert, one would take you to be the most egotistical mortal in the world," said Mrs. Cardale.

"You flatter me, dear," answered her brother. "I like a good, strong, manly egotism. It gives backbone to a fellow."

"And is merely another name for selfishness," retorted Mrs. Cardale. "After that, I think a little music would be a pleasant change."

"By all means a little music, if Miss Davenant will so far favour us," said Mr. Bruhn, eagerly. "I have not forgotten the last time you played to us. It was really a treat."

Margaret always complied cheerfully with such requests, and this evening she sat at the piano for upwards of an hour, playing Mrs. Cardale's favourite pieces one after another, and quitting the instrument at last before her hearers were tired of listening.

"Robert has paid you a greater compliment than he often pays me," said Mrs. Cardale, as Margaret left the piano. "Not unfrequently he goes off into a sound sleep while I am doing my poor best to please him."

"Too true—too true," assented Mr. Bruhn. "But I take it as a great proof of Etta's musical talent that she can thus charm this savage breast, and soothe me into a slumber as sweet as that of any babe."

"Hypocrite!" sighed Mrs. Cardale. Then, turning to Margaret, she said, "I have been begging and praying of Robert to steal a holiday for a few weeks, and accompany me to Pau. But, no—his excuse is, work—work—work. He professes that he cannot leave that wretched business to take care of itself even for a month, when he might, were he so minded, leave it for ever, and enjoy life as he ought to do with the means at his command. Really, there are times when I have no patience with him."

Mr. Bruhn turned to Miss Davenant.

"How rarely," he observed with a smile, "do women show any interest in, or have more than the vaguest knowledge of, the occupations or professions which engage for so many hours each day the time and thoughts of their husbands and brothers, and on the successful pursuit of which their own home comforts, nine times out of ten, so absolutely depend. My sister here, for instance, cannot understand that it is a pleasure to me to find myself at the head of a large concern, such as mine is; where three hundred workmen look up to me as their employer, and are dependent on me, in a great measure, for their daily bread. Nor that it is far sweeter to me to be a busy manufacturer, earning money by my success in trade, than it would be to be an idle fine gentleman, lounging about the Continent, or dawdling from one country-house to another, without any definite aim or object in life. She cannot see that what I value more than the actual money I make out of my business—being already pretty well-to-do in the world, and having no child to succeed me when I die—is my capacity for making it. Besides this, there is the sense of power, and of responsibility, as being the head of a large concern—and power is sweet to the souls of men. Mine a dull, plodding, unenjoyable life! Cannot you understand that my morning's ride is all the pleasanter to me from knowing, that for several hours after it is over I shall be shut up in a close office? Cannot you comprehend how of an evening my news-

paper, my book and my cigar are made all the sweeter to me from the knowledge that I have been working hard all day, and have duly earned them? A holiday now and then if you please; but as a rule, plenty of hard work: such, as it seems to me, is the only way for anyone to appreciate and enjoy—yes, my dear sister, enjoy—life, who cannot content himself with merely skimming its surface, as a sea-gull skims the waves.”

Margaret's face was turned towards him as he ceased speaking.

“I, too, think,” said she, “that all of us, both men and women, ought to have some firm anchorage in life, some definite object for which to strive, and put forth our best endeavours. The culture of the beautiful, as I take it, should always be held subsidiary to the serious, downright business of life. The acanthus-leaves that crown the column are left unchiselled till the long, bare shaft itself has been hewn and polished by patient toil.”

“Really, I seem to have roused quite a hornets' nest about my ears,” said Mrs. Cardale, “and all because I happened to say that I could not see the necessity for Robert to work as hard as he does. But here is Miss Beatrice, sitting as mum as a mouse. I hope that she, too, is not going to prove to be what somebody calls an ‘Apostle of Labour.’”

“No, indeed,” answered Trix, blushing and smiling at the same time. “I am afraid that if I were rich, I should be of just the same opinion as you are—that it is both wiser and pleasanter to travel about and see the world—to study the beautiful in nature and art wherever it is to be found—than to stay at home from year's end to year's end, while one's mind gradually narrows to the limits of the little circle in which we live, or becomes so saturated with the idea of one's own importance, that it seems never quite able to forget that miserable little fact. How I long to travel!”

“Only to come back at last, weary of the great world, and find that the sweetest wisdom is that which is hived at home,” said Margaret.

“If Miss Beatrice is going to preach the doctrines of the *far niente* school,” said Mr. Bruhn, “I, for one, shall begin to tremble for my faith.”

As Margaret Davenant quitted Brook Lodge that night, she could not help sighing to herself, to think how many months must pass before she could hope to cross its pleasant threshold again.

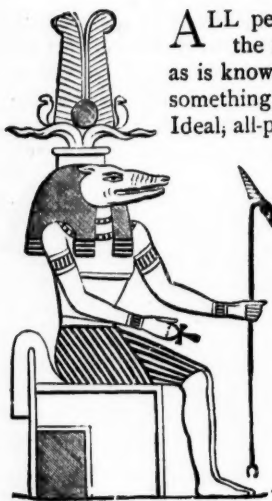
“Not till Mrs. Cardale comes back next spring shall I re-enter these doors,” she said.

But on that point she was strangely mistaken.

(To be continued.)

IN THE LOTUS LAND.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"THE BRETONS AT HOME," ETC. ETC.



SEBEK.

ALL people of the earth, the most remote tribes, the most savage and barbarian, have felt, as far as is known, an innate need for worship ; a desire for something far above themselves ; a craving for an Ideal, all-powerful and miraculous, that would bestow upon them the fruits of the earth, the blessings of prosperity. All people and tribes seem to have recognised the existence of some sort of religion ; to have possessed some innate consciousness of the immortality of the soul, of life beyond death, and of the doctrine of Retribution. This instinctive belief has been so universal that it would almost seem to have been handed down from some primeval race possessed of Divine favour and revelation : such, for instance, as was given to Adam, who, in the days of Eden and innocence, was admitted to the knowledge and, it may be, the friendship of his Creator, and was intended for an exist-

ence in which sin, suffering and death had no part.

The savage tribes of the earth, with their cannibal propensities almost placing them lower than the animal creation, form one of the inscrutable mysteries of our present state of existence, in which mysteries abound. That these savages should exist at all seems degrading to a higher and more civilised race, actuated by everything that is refined and elevated. Yet that they form part of the great brotherhood of mankind is proved by their openness to conversion, their susceptibility to influence. Some of the wildest amongst them have become some of the best, most earnest and most consistent of Christians. Yet the mystery of their condition remains unfathomable, amongst the "deep things of God." Why man, made in the image of God, should have been permitted to fall from his first estate is a question we ask ourselves whenever we are brought face to face with the subject, and the answer must be left to that day when, the veil raised, we shall no longer see through a glass darkly. Whether it is part of the terrible penalty of original sin ; whether a divine visitation upon a special people ; or whether designed for the purpose of

showing forth the power of Christianity and the loving-kindness of the Almighty in some indirect manner not evident to our limited views ; this we can never know. We cannot solve the mystery ; but we can leave it in faith, assured that it must be to serve some great purpose of which the final end is Love : for David has said, "Thy tender mercies are over all Thy works." We cannot see the end from the beginning even of our little life, or of a single year of our life ; therefore, the Divine plan for the ordering of the universe may well be altogether past man's understanding. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?

The necessity, we repeat, for worshipping *something* seems always to have existed ; and exists, no doubt, in some form, amongst the undiscovered and most barbarous tribes of the earth, if any remain. It is often a rude, cruel belief—the doctrine of propitiation, demanding the mutilation of the body, the sacrifice of life : for Love is only the doctrine of Revelation. But this, after all, is only the idea that the monks and pilgrims of a more enlightened condition carried out in the middle and yet more recent ages ; torturing themselves by a hundred petty inflictions, including life-long vigils and withdrawals into convents and monasteries from everything that makes life and the world beautiful ; all things that were given us richly to enjoy. These men for self-sacrifice and self-denial, substitute self-torture and persecution. No savage tribe was ever more relentless than the Inquisition, with its refinement of cruelty and its secret agencies.

With some heathen tribes, religion is the worship of the sun ; with others the worship of the moon and stars ; with the Indians and the Chinese, who are civilised as well as heathen, it is the worship of images of wood and stone ; marble deities with a mild and placid expression, a serenity suggestive of power and a benevolence encouraging to a doctrine of wrath ; vengeance that has to be conciliated by slaughter and bloodshed. Juggernaut still claims his worshippers and the car its victims.

In going back to the oldest people of whom we have any record—the ancient Egyptians—we find their religion was of a very mixed character. It contained much that was ingenious and a little that was beautiful. And we are frequently not a little startled at the faint conception, the slight foreshadowing of some of the fundamental principles of our own creed ; as though here again, true religion, the one true doctrine, had in ages even more remote than the Egyptians, been known and practised, and had become lost as men gradually fell away from the worship of the One True God, and, like the Israelites in the desert, made themselves golden calves and images of wood and stone. It is impossible to say that this was so, but it would explain much that is remarkable in the worship of the Egyptians.

It is difficult to trace back the religion of these ancients, and to

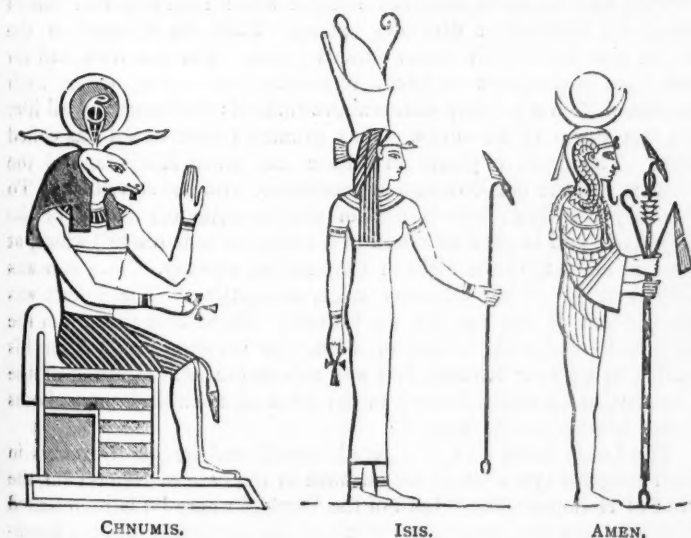
thoroughly understand the meaning of many of their rites and ceremonies. They were essentially a symbolical and mysterious people, and took the utmost pains to disguise their thoughts in unusually complicated hieroglyphics. The key to these has not been fully discovered, probably never will be. Nor does it very much matter. We are all interested in the *History* of Egypt, and the hieroglyphics concerning it, not being mysteriously recorded in the language of the priests, have been interpreted, thanks in the first instance to Dr. Young, in the second to Champollion. But their *worship* their rites and ceremonies, concern us less ; and of these we know sufficient to dispense with the unknown.

Different forms of worship frequently bore the same name ; where nothing was true and stable, the religion was frequently changing. New rites were constantly being invented to suit the needs of progressive people, and new gods were created for the same reason. They had some idea of true religion, but they were as people groping in the dark, whilst fancying themselves in the full blaze of enlightenment. The amount of trouble they took for their gods, the labour and wealth devoted to honour them, may serve as a lesson to many a latter-day community. On the other hand it may be urged that theirs was a religion of sacrifice, whilst Christianity is one of mercy, in which the One Great Sacrifice, once for all, has been paid ; even as the Jews also are given to good works from a propitiatory point of view, considering their ultimate salvation to depend upon them ; whilst the good works of Christians are offered simply as a mark of gratitude to Him whose mercies are new every morning.

The religion of Egypt in the course of time grew so complicated and involved that only the High Priests and the learned thoroughly understood it ; the faith of the people remained primitive and rude, and they followed very much as children. The great temples that we hear of, and of which so many ruins remain on the banks of the Nile and elsewhere, were not built for the purposes of general worship, the assembling together of the people, so strictly enjoined upon the Christians. They were temples erected in the honour of the god or gods whose name they bore ; monuments frequently existing merely to hold some image of wood or stone, that was supposed to rule over certain of the destinies of mankind. Only the high priests entered these temples and offered sacrifice to the idols ; the people had no concern in the matter. But the people in their way were deeply religious and superstitious, and all Eastern people ever have been ; their love of the mysterious, the superstitious element in their nature and the warmth and vividness of their imagination combining to render them specially receptive of rites and doctrines affecting the unseen world and future state.

As their religion grew more and more complicated and less and less widely understood, it fell into what was called the Esoteric Doctrine ; the very word meaning hidden or mysterious, and limited,

in contradistinction to Exoteric, external and widespread. The followers of the Esoteric doctrine believed in matter rather than spirit; everything was evolved out of matter, which was eternal and immutable, capable of changing its form but not its properties. Matter itself was endowed with thought and creative power. It is difficult to conceive a more senseless belief, incapable of raising the world to higher good, or influencing the lives of its followers. For this very reason—the impossibility of bringing the complicated mysteries of the Esoteric doctrine to bear upon the understanding of the people, the Exoteric doctrine was established—a more outward and visible form of religion, in which the various phenomena in



Nature, such as the sun, moon and stars, light, water, the fertile earth herself, were embodied in forms of wood and stone, and thus visibly brought before the popular mind and understanding. The people could realise a statue, but could not grasp an abstract idea. So with these primitive races God was seen in all Nature, animate and inanimate. They worshipped animals, they worshipped the sun and moon. We honour our earthly monarch as of Divine appointment—"King by the Grace of God"—but the Egyptians worshipped their king as an incarnation of God; worshipped him in life and after death. Here the idea is very faintly but distinctly followed by the Roman Catholics, who canonize their best and most religiously illustrious lives, and after death pray to them; each devoted Catholic having his special patron Saint. Another point of comparison between the Roman Catholic and the Egyptian—if it may be permitted to

compare a Christian doctrine with a pagan—is, that in each instance symbolism is a great fundamental principle. The Egyptians were nothing if not symbolical ; they delighted in mystery and superstition. If the Roman Catholics did away with symbolism, their creed, or rather its errors, would inevitably fall to the ground, resolved, perhaps, into the beauty and simplicity of the Protestant faith, where outward forms and ceremonies mean so little, and everything depends upon the state of the heart and the inner man.

Nevertheless the various doctrines of Egypt were progressive, and their latest forms of belief and worship were of a higher nature than their earliest—those of which we possess any knowledge and record.

They had two great divinities to begin with : Ptah and Ra : out of which all their other divinities sprang. Ptah, the Creator of the world, was worshipped under various forms. Ra, the Sun, had no less than seventy-five different representations. But even Ptah emanated from a primary source above himself : the source of all life, the first cause of all things. This primary Cause of all was called Nun. The creative power in Nature was called Khepera, and the emblem was the beetle or sacred Scarabæus, with the sun's disk. To this day the Scarabæus is one of the favourite ornaments of the Egyptians, and is often mounted in a setting of outstretched wings, at once an emblem of the flight of time and of eternity. The sun was deified at his rising, noonday stage, and setting. The Sphinx was an emblem of the sun on the horizon. Ra at first appears in the Nun deity under the name of Tum, the evening sun. After his setting he became Khrum, and was reborn the next morning of the Creation, at his rising, issuing in the form of a child from a Lotus flower floating on the Nun.

The Lotus flower was considered sacred, and frequently recurs in their religious symbols : as, for instance in the case of Nefer-Tum, the God of Heliopolis, the " Lord of the World," where he is represented with head of a lion, on which is perched a hawk—emblem of the Resurrection—crowned with Lotus flowers, emblems of purity.

The blue or white Lotus-flower was indigenous to Egypt, and in early days Egypt was essentially the Lotus Land. Where it is now found elsewhere, it has been borrowed : just as the Papyrus is now found in Sicily and has ceased to flourish in Egypt ; just as Egypt herself has borrowed a few trees and flora from other countries. The Lotus flower is now dying out of Egypt, but she will never cease to be the Lotus Land ; in the same manner that England, if all her roses left her, would still retain the rose as her emblem.

The evening came before the morning in the mythological creation of the Egyptians ; and the infernal regions, or regions of darkness—not of torment—which they believed in and called Amenthes, were created before the regions of light and life. Nun was the Source of Life. Ptah was the creator of all things, Ra, the sun, was the daily renewer of life. Osiris was the principle of light. He was the god

of the lower world, having control over the regions of darkness. Ra was often added to his name. Isis was the fruit-bearing earth.



GREAT TEMPLE OF ABU-SIMBEL.

In different parts of Egypt they had different forms to represent the same god; again, they would have the same form to represent

different gods. The bull Apis, at Memphis, was a symbol of Ptah, the creator of the world; but at On, the bull Men was the incarnation of Ra, the sun.

In the earlier times, as far as can be gathered from inscriptions and hieroglyphics, they did not offer sacrifice or worship to their gods; if they worshipped at all, it was at the tombs of deceased relatives. The worship of the sacred bulls at Memphis and On, was established by Kakao, in the second dynasty, 4,000 years before Christ. On was the Hebrew name for Heliopolis, and is frequently mentioned in the Bible. It is recorded in Genesis, for instance, that Pharaoh gave Joseph the daughter of Potiphera, a priest of Heliopolis, named Asenath, in marriage. The word Potiphera means "dedicated to Ra," the god representing the sun. It lay in the land of Goshen. The Arabs called it *Ain Shems*, the "Well of the Sun," from its fertile and sunny plains.

The Sun Temple of Ra at Heliopolis was the most ancient and celebrated shrine in Egypt, excepting the Temple of Ptah at Memphis. The rites offered to the deities were lengthy and splendid, and were in honour of all the gods connected with the sun. Osiris, Horus and Isis were specially worshipped, the former as the Soul of Ra, called the Ancient of Heliopolis. Isis and Osiris were the children of Nut, the goddess of space, and of Seb, the god of the earth, and possessed eternal youth. Horus represents the upper world, the regions of light, and is emblematical of the Resurrection, and the triumph of all good over all evil. He is also called the Wing-Expander, and nothing is more common in the setting of jewelry in the present day than the open wings, typical of Horus and the flight of time.

The Mnevis bull, the animal sacred to Ra, was also worshipped at Heliopolis, taking the place of the Apis bull, which was transferred to Memphis.

So also was the Phoenix worshipped, the bird that rose from the dead after five hundred years, and brought its ashes to Heliopolis. The Phoenix was called *bennu* by the Egyptians, the "bird from the land of the palms." The bird, whenever placed by the side of Ra, was a symbol of the soul of Osiris. Ra is generally represented with the body of a man and the head of a hawk, coloured red, above which appears a disk, carrying Uraeus, the serpent. Ra was the king of gods, the great universe itself, and the worship of all the other divinities was combined in him. Cats were also held sacred in Heliopolis: a superstition that has not come down to the present day. It was in the great hall of the temple that the wounds of Horus were said to have been healed, received in the conflict with Typhon, one of the most remote of gods, the deity of war, and the special protector of foreigners: and Aphrodite was his goddess, so called by the Greeks. When Egypt was unfortunate in her wars, as she eventually became, they considered that he had ceased to be favourable to them, gave up his worship and erased his name from their monuments.

The foundation of the temple of Ra is lost in antiquity. Only that at Memphis is of earlier date. Amenemhat I., first king of the Twelfth Dynasty, founded the Sun Temple at Heliopolis, but it was only completed in the reign of his son, Usertesen, who placed in front of it the obelisk that is still standing, and, with a few ruined walls, is all that remains of the ancient City of the Sun.

The surrounding plain, not of great extent, is barren and desolate. It is impossible to conceive that here once existed one of the most famous, most magnificent cities of Egypt; a city given up to splendid palaces and gorgeous temples; where the rites and ceremonies of the Egyptian religion were for ever being celebrated with a lavishness and completeness only equalled at Memphis. To-day it is a spot desolate and abandoned; a few pale crumbling walls repose in silence and solitude; walls so much the colour of the sandy earth that you cannot always distinguish one from the other. A few solitary palms stand out against the great expanse of sky; the obelisk raises its venerable head in lonely grandeur, pointing to the heavens and reading its moral. It is the oldest of all the discovered obelisks,



SOUL REVISITING ITS BODY, HOLDING THE EMBLEMS OF LIFE AND BREATH.

excepting a very small one found by Lepsius in the Necropolis of Memphis: of date anterior to the one in Paris, or to Cleopatra's Needle, which originally came from Heliopolis. These obelisks were always erected in pairs, and were destined to serve two purposes: they broke the monotony of the outline of the temple walls by their direct contrast; and they offered an excellent surface for inscriptions recording the greatness of kings, their victories and virtues. They were also considered emblems of the sun's rays.

The solitary obelisk now standing in the lonely plains of Heliopolis is of red granite of Syene. It is sixty-six feet high, and with no object near it to suggest comparison, looks even higher. Its companion fell in the twelfth century, and was probably gradually broken up, for no trace of it remains anywhere. In these days a fallen monument would very soon disappear under the hands of the legion of tourists who go about with a pocket-hammer and chisel in order to chip off

the nose of a tempting cherub, or fragments of the wing of an ancient phoenix. And, alas, the Phoenix does not rise again from its ashes in these days, whatever it may have done in the days of the early Egyptian dynasties. The private museums existing in various parts of the world are sufficient to plunge the real lover of antiquities—who is ever conservative, not destroying—into the regions of hopeless melancholy.

All four sides of the obelisk at Heliopolis bear inscriptions; but two of the sides have been obliterated by the wild bees who have made their cells in the hieroglyphics. This of course could be remedied, but no one seems to care to disturb these industrious little insects, who themselves appear to be antiquarians. Moreover, as each side bears exactly the same inscription—a waste of good material, with which one would scarcely have credited the ancients—it is, as Mr. Toots would say, of no consequence. The two remaining sides which are legible record how Usertesen, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord of the diadems and son of the Sun, founded the obelisk on the first day of the Festival of Seti, which was celebrated every thirty years.

The Temple of Ra, near which was the obelisk, was of immense wealth. The Kings presented it with lavish gifts, each endeavouring to outvie his predecessor in generosity and magnificence. As we have said, the Kings or Pharaohs were considered as embodiments or incarnations of Ra, the Sun God, and one of the King's titles was "Lord of Heliopolis."

The staff of priests and servitors connected with the temple is said to have been upwards of twelve thousand: a fact which proves at once the enormous population of Egypt and the vastness of the building. What should we think in these days of a religious building needing only a twelfth or even twenty-fourth part of this immense crowd of officials? In contemplating the power, resources and magnificence of these ancient days, it almost seems as if the world had decayed and degenerated, and was peopled by a race of pigmies, whose highest and proudest achievements would have been passed over in the days of the Pyramids as trifling and unworthy.

The Egyptians were very fond of deifying their animals, and of giving mixed forms to their gods, such as a human body joined to the head of a bird or animal. The nature of each bird or animal symbolized corresponded with the nature attributed to the deity. A certain number of these creatures, birds and animals, were kept by the priests, and after death were embalmed and treated with the utmost veneration. The cow was an emblem of the maternal divinities, because she possessed the qualities of motherly patience and nursing: qualities she has never lost, as all will admit who have watched her calm and expressive eye; the crocodile was emblematical of Sebek, the god who caused the overflow of the Nile, on which the prosperity of the country depended; the hawk was dedicated to

Ra, the Sun god, from its swift flight heavenwards. The goddess of love was portrayed with the head of a lion or a cat. The



TOMBS AT THEBES.

Egyptians evidently did not think as we do, or else these animals, unlike the patient cow, have changed their nature. A lion is the object of

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our fear, even if of our admiration, and a cat is certainly not the object of our affection. The cow was sacred to Isis, the goddess of all that was good and beautiful, and Isis is represented as wearing the vulture cap, the cow's horns, the disk of the moon, and the throne; sometimes one or the other separately, sometimes all four symbols in conjunction.

The goddess represented with the head of a lion or a cat was Sekhet, or Pasht, and her duties were by no means confined to the gentler passions. She was a symbol of the burning heat of Ra, the sun, of whom she was the daughter; and in Amenthes, the lower regions, she had to fight against the serpent Apep, and was armed with a knife, the Nemesis who pursued and punished the guilty. She possessed two distinct individualities, corresponding with her names. As Sekhet, according to an inscription at Philæ, found near "Pharaoh's bed," she was vengeful and to be dreaded; as Pasht she was soft, yielding and well disposed. Can we do nothing in these days to restore the lost reputation of the feline world—so long an object of the deepest regard to the Egyptians?

Ra, the sun, was supposed to die every night, when he set and went down into the regions of darkness, and to recreate himself every morning as he reappeared.

As we have said, he had three names, according to his journey through the heavens. At sunrise he was Hermachis, and the Sphinx was his visible representative; at mid-day he was Ra, the period of his greatest strength, his full manhood, or godhood; at night, on going down, he was Tum. During the hours of darkness, his passage through the lower regions, he was Osiris.

Isis, the moon, had not the same variety of names, the same stages of career. She was less important than Ra, of whom she was the sister and the wife, but she came next to him in rank and power. They reigned together, and bestowed upon Egypt all her wealth and prosperity. When Typhon shut up Osiris into a chest and threw him into the Nile, Isis was disconsolate, and sought him throughout the country. She found him near Byblus, and concealed the body. Typhon discovered it and cut it up into fourteen pieces, which he scattered far and near. These fragments Isis collected, and erected a monument on each spot in which a fragment had been found.

Then Horus, her son, went forth to avenge his father.

Osiris was not dead. It was only his body that had been so treated. He himself was reigning in the lower regions, and he visited Horus, and prepared him for battle against Typhon, whom Horus eventually defeated.

Osiris was the principle of light, Typhon of darkness, and Typhon was banished to the infernal regions. The same gods possessed different functions or properties or influences, at different times. Thus at one time, Isis is the moon, at another she is the fruit-bearing earth. At one time Osiris is called the soul of Ra, making

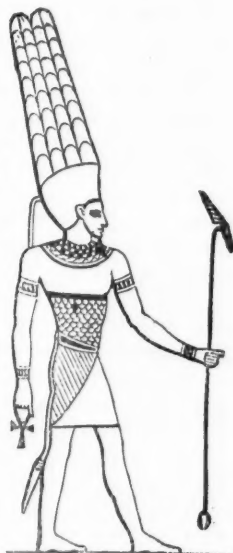
visible the hidden principles of light ; at another he is the emblem of moisture, which produces fertility, as embodied in the Nile and its overflow. Typhon is always the opposite to Osiris, endeavouring to counteract his influences. When Osiris is the embodiment of light, Typhon is that of darkness ; when Osiris represents moisture and fertility, Typhon is emblematical of drought and barrenness. He prevents the overflow of the Nile, on which Egypt depends ; but goodness always conquers in the end ; he is vanquished by Horus, the river rises, and the waters spread with wholesome and fertilizing results.

It is clear that the Egyptians were a religious people, full of thoughtful problems about death and the future state. They firmly believed in the immortality of the soul. In spite of their crude arrangement, the multiplicity of their gods, they were nearer the true belief than appears on the surface at a first glance. They believed in one supreme Being, one original and divine source, mysterious, incomprehensible, from whom all else emanated, matter, soul, intelligence. He was the source of all good, the combater of everything evil.

All this they embodied in symbols. The sacred animals were symbols to them, not objects of worship. They endowed them with divine attributes ; each one was supposed to possess within it a small portion of divinity ; but when it died, it in no way affected that divinity from which it sprang. They looked upon the world as a drama, having its essence and origin in one supreme Being, who guided the destinies of man and disposed of the soul after death ; rewarding the good, punishing the evil.

We see how much of truth there was in their belief, in spite of all their heathenish rites and ceremonies. Their system at last grew so complicated and profound that the people ceased to understand it, and only the priests could interpret the situation. They thought much of life after death, and endeavoured by groping to discover the unknown and the unseen.

Many of their representations, we repeat, were merely symbolical, not to be worshipped ; that they were grotesque was the fault of the age they lived in. Beauty and perfection of form and sentiment have been reserved for our own advanced times and ideas. Even some of the greatest painters of the middle ages, though such masters in colouring, are stiff and grotesque in form and outline. And as re-



CHONSU.

gards symbolism, we cannot ourselves quite do without it ; it is occasionally necessary to enable our finite minds to grasp the infinite and the divine. Thus we have the Paschal Lamb as typical of the Sacrifice of our Lord ; we have the spirit of God descending in the form of a dove ; the men of this world are compared to sheep and goats ; and in the Day of Judgment, the sheep are placed on the right hand, the goats on the left. Life is likened to a river of water, clear as crystal ; the remedy for sin and evil to the leaves of a tree given for the healing of the nations. The book of the Revelation teems with symbolism ; and the beasts described by St. John in his vision, as being full of eyes before and behind, would be more grotesque upon canvas, and far more terrifying, than anything left behind by the Egyptians.

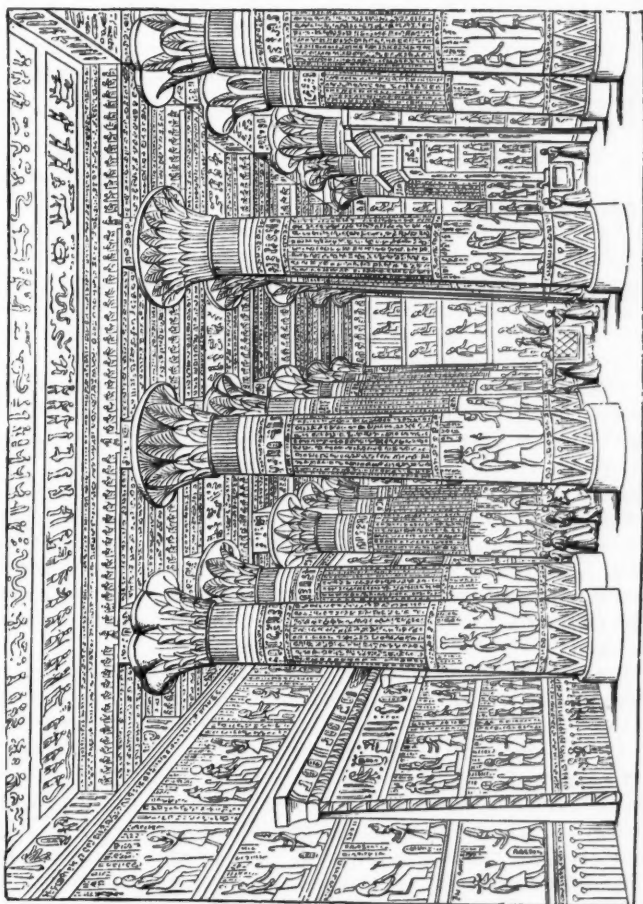
It is certain that these people were profound thinkers, earnest and devoted, with no light to guide them, such as Heaven in its infinite mercy has bestowed upon us. Yet they were not left as heathens. They possessed a deep sense of religion. They believed in heaven and in hell ; the powers of good and evil. It is, as we have already remarked, just as though a people living long before them, of whom no record remains, had been vouchsafed divine revelation, with the favour of the One True God, perhaps had even been admitted to a close communion with heaven ; a perfect state of existence gradually lost and withdrawn, as man, through sin, became more and more separated from his Maker.

Whatever the reason and explanation, the fact remains that the consciousness of a Supreme and Beneficent Being, a life after death, man's immortality, his responsibility, the doctrine of good and evil, punishment and reward ; all this has been grasped and believed in, more or less firmly, at all periods of the world's history, by mankind.

It was firmly grasped by the Egyptians ; a great fundamental truth, so mixed up with error, symbolism and barbarism, that the truth itself was almost lost sight of. Like the Children of Israel in the wilderness—and their sin was more deliberate, impatient and inexcusable—they set up their golden calf in a thousand different forms, to the blinding of their eyes and the confusion of their reason. But they were earnest and sincere ; they reflected much upon life and its problems ; with their whole heart and soul they endeavoured to discover the truth, and to satisfy cravings which they could not understand—an absolute necessity of their being—they made themselves visible gods in the likeness of men and animals, worshipping through them the Invisible. It is also a strange fact that many of these divinities are represented holding in their hand the symbol of the Cross.

In some indefinite manner, these visible objects seemed to them a key to life's mysteries, they made them an answer to questions which, generation after generation, had troubled and perplexed them : just as they would trouble and perplex us if we had not Divine revelation to

guide us into all truth, and to solve for us the mysterious and incomprehensible. They were baffled and perplexed by the existence of good and evil, of light and darkness, of life and death, the constant warfare going on between these opposing elements, and they sought out an explanation. Their polytheism was full of philosophy of a



TEMPLE AT ESNEH.

deep and most earnest description ; a plurality of gods, if you will, but all subservient to one Supreme Being, the primary cause of all, unseen, incomprehensible, dwelling in the heaven of heavens. We, who are more favoured, see their errors ; but we can also see the great fundamental fact, the feeling of truth, underlying all. The God they believed in was a Being gifted with infinite power and intelligence, perfect

in goodness ; he was ONE and undivided ; ever the same, unchangeable, the holder of the universe, the creator of all, with neither beginning of days nor end of life, filling the universe with his immensity, everywhere present, nowhere visible. The lesser gods they fashioned were merely His instruments, carrying out His will : rays, as it were, emanating from His glorious attributes. What a sublime doctrine, how near the truth, for a people without revelation ; evolved out of their inner consciousness, that craving for truth and immortality which, planted by the Almighty in every human heart, is in itself a revelation and a guide.

As time went on many of their forms and beliefs changed. This was inevitable. They were very much in the condition of a vessel without compass that, having lost its way, steers hither and thither in its endeavours to reach home.

Religion became less simple, more legendary. The Egyptians came into greater contact with the races of the remoter East, whose mystic theologies appealed to their imagination. They created new gods, and many of the old gods were given new attributes.

The new beliefs fitted in well with all their symbolism. New names appear in their records. Osiris still maintained his supremacy, and sacrifices were offered to him rather than to the dead, as had been hitherto. More honour was paid to him, and they formed him a Court to assist in the judgment of the soul after death. Thoth was the recorder, Anubis the watcher, Ma was the impersonation of Truth.

All this was taking place some two thousand years before the Christian era. Every human being possessed three parts : body, soul, and spirit. The soul they called *Sahu*, and *Khu* was an emanation of the divine intelligence—the spirit. Each element was separate and distinct from the other, but combined during the earthly life. Each could be separated from the other if necessary, but their properties were immutable.

After this life, the soul passed within the gates of Amenhes, the regions of darkness, and here had to go through many trials. Battles had to be fought, and all had to be overcome with the "Ritual of the Dead," inscribed upon parchment and placed within the bandage of every mummy. After many conflicts, the soul entered the great hall of justice, where its heart was placed in a balance held by the goddess of truth. The Court was present. Horus conducted the weighing, Anubis, the watcher, was at his post ; Thoth entered the record, and Osiris pronounced sentence, aided by his forty-two counsellors. If the proper weight was not reached—if the heart was found wanting—it was condemned to the regions of darkness for a certain period, or to take up its abode in the body of some animal : after which it returned to its original body and began a new life. If, at the second trial, its weight was satisfactory, the soul—not immediately, but after a series of progressions—passed into a final condition of perfect happiness.

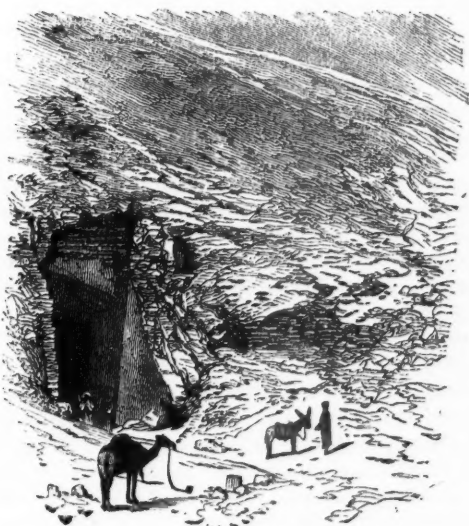
It was in the twelfth Dynasty that the great Temple of the Sun was rebuilt at Heliopolis, and the obelisk was first used as an emblem of the sun's rays, and of the creative power which endowed men and animals with life.

The name of the god Amen, the monarch of all the gods, appears now for the first time, a former deity under a new title. He was a local divinity at Coptos, and later at Thebes, and had his dwelling in a distant and mysterious land in the East, a land unknown to man, whose exact position was not revealed. From this land all the gods were said to have come.

It was about this time also that the Great Ritual, or Book of the Dead, was first compiled; a book which grew in volume as time went on. It was intended to facilitate the entrance of the soul into the regions of eternal happiness; to help it in its combats and conflicts with the powers of darkness and evil, which, in Amenthes, would endeavour to wrest it from its ultimate purification. It consisted of a series of prayers and formulas specially adapted for the great purpose to be fulfilled; and altered

and added to from time to time, as their religious ideas changed or progressed. A copy was bound up in the swathing clothes of every mummy, and interment could not take place without it. The book, at last, reached great dimensions, and, in a copy possessed by the Museum at Turin, there are one hundred and sixty-five chapters, with long descriptions of the trials of the soul after death. "As the tree falls, so it shall lie," was not the doctrine of the Ancient Egyptians; with them the destiny of the soul, trial, conflict, ultimate loss or gain, all was decided after death; all took place in the regions of Amenthes.

The soul, arrived at the Hall of Justice, pleaded its cause, according to this Book of the Dead, before Osiris and the judges, in some such words as these:



ENTRANCE TO THE TOMBS OF THE KINGS AT THEBES

"All honour and adoration be unto you, lords of Truth and Justice! All honour and adoration unto thee, Osiris, perfect and great deity! I have come towards thee, my lord and master; I stand before thee that I may contemplate thy perfections! I have committed no fraud or crime towards mankind, when upon earth. I have not oppressed the widow! I have not foresworn myself in courts of justice! I have not set the servant against his master! I have not starved the poor nor caused his tears to flow. I have done no murder! I have not robbed the temples of their bread, nor rifled the dead in their tombs! I have not given short measure, nor taken grain from the fields of the stranger. I have not falsified the scales, nor robbed the children of their inheritance. I have never snared the sacred birds! I am pure! I am pure! I am pure!"

This short extract proves that the Egyptians, according to their lights, possessed a high moral code; were strict lovers of justice, and had very advanced ideas concerning charity and benevolence, which largely entered into their creed. The sacred animals were partly instituted by them as watchers over mankind, in order that they might record his shortcomings, and he might be kept in the right way by the knowledge that hosts of witnesses—seen and unseen—were about him. "A bird of the air shall carry the tale, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter," says Solomon, as if paraphrasing the belief of the Egyptians; and in our own day we laughingly ascribe mysterious rumours to the power of these winged messengers.

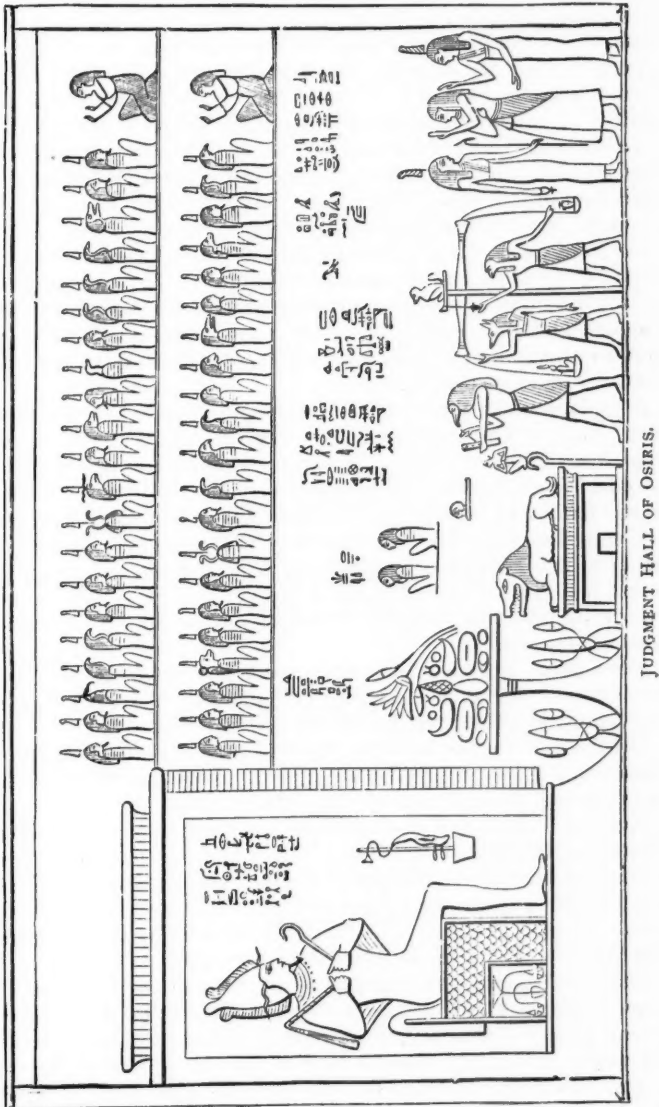
The Egyptians were very exact in their burial. Their tombs were always placed either in the desert or in the side of the mountain: some spot safe from intrusion. They looked upon the tomb as their place of eternal abode, and gave it far more care and consideration than they bestowed upon their earthly habitation. When we see the wonderful and extraordinary labour given to the building of a pyramid, merely as a place of repose after death, we may conceive a little of the reverence and importance they bestowed upon the subject.

But the ordinary tombs were not pyramids, which few but the kings could build.

The earliest tombs consisted of three divisions: an exterior building, consisting of one or more chambers, opening to a long vertical pit or shaft, ending in a third vault or chamber, in which the coffin was placed in a large marble tomb or sarcophagus.

The richer and more important the dead, the more magnificent and ornamental was the entrance to the tomb. The names and title of the dead were inscribed on the lintel, with a petition to Anubis, the guardian-deity of all tombs, praying him to accord the deceased distinguished funeral rites and a good burial-place in the cemetery; to help him in his journey through Amenthes; and to secure him through all eternity the just payment of funereal offerings by those who come after him.

The inscriptions on the walls related to the dead, and were con-



JUDGMENT HALL OF OSIRIS.

fined to the subjects just mentioned. The sarcophagus, where it was possible, was hewn out of the solid rock. Everything was done to

protect the body from violation ; and we have seen that one of the soul's chief pleas for favour with Osiris was that he had not violated the tombs of the dead.

The sepulchral chamber was walled up, never to be destroyed, and as far as possible the opening was concealed. The chambers at the exterior portals were used as mortuary chapels. Here the priests and relatives of the deceased assembled once a year to perform their ceremonies and offer their gifts. These walls were covered with carvings or paintings representing scenes in the life of the dead, concluding with his burial. Many of these tombs are probably amongst the ancient relics and remains of Egypt yet to be discovered.

Such are some of the broad outlines of the religion of the old Egyptians ; and we find much to admire in their primitive endeavours to solve the mysteries of life and death and immortality ; much that was high and noble and worthy of honour ; much that has come down to us, confirmed and strengthened and elevated through the revelation vouchsafed to us.

As time went on, their creed became more and more legendary—more involved and complicated. Fresh dynasties brought in new gods—fresh forms of belief. Centuries rolled on, and the world, in the councils of Infinite Wisdom, was growing ripe for Revelation. In the fulness of time, in the reign of Augustus, came the greatest and most momentous event the world has ever seen—the Birth of the Saviour. With this event Egypt is intimately associated, for thither Joseph and Mary took the young Child for protection ; and under a Coptic church in Cairo we were shown a spot where they are said to have rested.

Then came a period when the mists and errors of idolatry and superstition melted away, Egypt embraced the pure light of Christianity, and all should have been well with her.

But in the course of time she fell away from her allegiance. Mohammed the false prophet arose, with his singular career. He belonged to a family settled at Mecca, a branch of the noble family of Kureish. His father died before he was born, his mother when he was about six years old. He was then taken in hand, first by his grandfather, next by his uncle. For some years he was a shepherd, a circumstance which caused him to attribute many passages of Scripture as referring to himself. After this he took commercial journeys with his uncle, and at twenty-five married a widow.

At forty he began his career as a leader of men and the founder of a new religion. Egypt at this time was under the dominion of the refined and intellectual but superstitious and idolatrous Arabs. Mohammed suffered from epilepsy, and at these times declared that he had seen visions and received divine revelations and commands. One of his reasons for success was that he believed in himself, and by his extraordinary energy and enthusiasm, convinced others. He was a man of great powers of mind, but quite uneducated. It is

not even certain that he could read or write. He began by converting his own family, and he called his new doctrine El-Islâm, or subjection to God. Persecutions arose, and Mohammed and his followers fled to Medina. Here his wife died, and he then married several other wives. For nearly five-and-twenty years he propagated his doctrine, gained an immense army of converts, fought battle after battle with the Meccans, now victorious, now defeated; until, worn out, he died on June 8, 632, at Medina, and was buried there.

Mohammed took the Scriptures as the foundation of his doctrine, calling himself the true prophet. His creed was embodied in these words: "lâ ilâha ill' Allah, wa Muhammedu-r-rasûl-Allah." "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is the prophet of God."

Everything that suited his purpose in the Scriptures he retained; everything that did not, he discarded or altered. The great fundamental doctrine he did not disturb, in so far as that he taught the worship of the one true God, but Him only. With a knowledge of the people he had to deal with, and in accordance with his own sensual nature, he brought in rules and regulations and permitted manners and customs that he knew would appeal to the Oriental temperament. Here again is another reason for his success. The pure and self denying religion of Christ was no longer necessary to the followers of Islâmism. The restraints placed upon them by Christianity were removed. It was no longer a doctrine of progression, of becoming more and more perfect, of overcoming the evil in one's nature by a constant seeking after holiness.

The Koran was compiled from various MSS. gathered together and published in Arabic in the year 635, two or three years after the death of Mohammed. It is a medley of Christian and Jewish doctrines and Oriental traditions. Many excellent doctrines were distorted by Mohammed simply because from his imperfect education he did not understand them; others he turned aside to suit his purposes. It differs from the old Egyptian religion in one essential point, entirely ignoring symbolism. Everything that could possibly degenerate into a mere matter of form and ceremony is avoided.

The Koran is considered the most perfect specimen of Arabic literature in existence. It contains rules not only for heavenly, but for earthly guidance. The points that Mohammed professed were revelations to himself, were taken from the Bible; the new laws, beliefs and regulations introduced were founded upon his profound knowledge of the Eastern nature. He gathered his material from every source; the Rabbinical, the Persian, the Egyptian, the Christian. He inculcated the doctrine of predestination. The Muslims were nearly all born to be saved, all other people to be lost. Thus they take no trouble to convert others, since their fate is sealed and cannot be turned aside.

Hospitality, duty towards one's neighbour, is strictly enjoined. If you eat salt with a Mohammedan you are safe with him. Temperance

is insisted upon. Each Muslim according to the Koran may have four wives ; but the unhappy husbands find them such a terrible handful that many only possess one wife.

Every Muslim has to perform a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime, to the tomb of the prophet. Outsiders are not admitted ; only they who are Mohammedans. A very few have risked discovery by disguising themselves, but it is a dangerous experiment ; failure would entail death. In days gone by, the whole distance had to be performed on foot, and the pilgrimage was a severe penance, a great trial of the faithful. Now the greater part of the distance is performed by water and the pilgrimage has become almost an excursion. When arriving towards Mecca, the pilgrims change their garments, substituting for the usual dress an apron and a piece of cloth over the left shoulder. The rites they have to go through last some time. They commence by performing the circuit of the Kába, kiss the black stone, listen to the sermon on Mount Arafat, and stone Satan in the valley of Mina. For the Muslims believe in Satan and in a whole legion of demons which Mahommed specially invented for his purpose and called *ginn*. Before their fall they occupied a middle rank between men and the angels. The earth was created merely by an effort of the divine will, as we ourselves also know and believe. God said, Let there be light, and there was light. The Muslims have a rosary consisting of ninety-nine beads, and every bead represents an attribute of God. The *ginn* were once in happiness, but falling through pride, an angel was commanded to banish them from their state and condition to the mountains of Káf, which surround the earth. They occasionally visit the earth, doing much harm to mankind, spreading evil. The angel who banished them afterwards rebelled, and became the devil.

Thus the Koran is compiled, paraphrasing and distorting the Bible : robbing it of its beauty, simplicity and inspiration ; though the Muslims also believe strongly in inspiration, and venerate the Koran to the utmost of their power.

The true Muslim prays five times daily. And the hours of prayer are proclaimed by the Muezzins from the minarets of the mosques. No one who has heard the sound in the early morning—perhaps awaking him out of enchanted dreams of Oriental magnificence—will easily forget the thrill with which he hears the clear voice of the Muezzin ringing through the air, bidding the faithful awake and pray. Occasionally it may be heard, yet more startling and thrilling, ringing through the night. This human voice takes the place of bells—the mosques have no bells—and there is much that is beautiful in the idea. "Allah is great," cries the Muezzin. "I testify that there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the prophet of Allah. Come to prayer ; come to worship ; Allah is great ; there is no God but Allah." Five times a day is this proclaimed : 1st, a little after sunset ; 2ndly, an hour and a half after

sunset, when night has fallen ; 3rdly, at daybreak ; 4thly, at mid-day ; lastly, in the afternoon, an hour and a half before sunset.

The Muslim when praying must remove his sandals and turn his face towards Mecca. He begins by putting his hands to his ears, then holds them below his girdle ; he has frequent prostrations and genuflexions, and finishes by turning his head to his right shoulder, then to his left : this to greet the good and bad angels who are ever in attendance upon him, each trying to gain the victory. Once a year there is the great fast, throughout the month Ramadân. From daybreak to sunset, day after day, nothing must pass the lips. They must not eat though dying of hunger, or drink though parched with thirst. But at sunset they may do both, and carry on their feasting if they please throughout the night. Before worshipping in the mosques they must wash ; a duty that was imposed by Mohammed more for sanitary than religious purposes. The court of every mosque is provided with a large pool or fountain, and here every worshipper washes his hands, his face and his feet. In the desert places, where water is not to be had, they are allowed to use sand instead, as a sort of figurative or symbolical cleansing.

But in speaking of Islâmism, we are rather wandering away from Ancient Egypt, its people and its religion : and it is here that our great interest lies. Volumes might be written upon the subject, and in a short paper the faintest outline can scarcely be given. Nevertheless, its slightest contemplation is wholesome, interesting and instructive. The more we consider and compare all the other creeds of the earth with Christianity, the more do the perfections of Christ, the holiness, the simplicity, the beauty of His doctrine and teaching stand out as pre-eminently above all others ; a doctrine worthy of being our example and admonition. Everything else pales and recedes and falls to the ground before it. Amazed, we feel that here, indeed, is Revelation, here is Truth ; the very embodiment of Divinity ; the knowledge of a Supreme Being of LOVE, above and beyond anything the heart and intellect of man could possibly have conceived.

And we bow down in adoration, and echo the cry of the Centurion : who, at the supreme moment when the Sacrifice was completed, and from the lips of the dying SAVIOUR came the words "IT IS FINISHED !" and darkness fell upon the earth : exclaimed with the certainty of conviction : TRULY THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD !



TO HIS OWN HINDRANCE.

"WHO'S your friend?" inquired Captain Markham.

It was not the first time that the tall blonde young officer had put such a question that evening. Seated with a solitary companion, at a small table in the crowded dining-room of the Palladium Club, and seeing himself surrounded by a number of faces that looked more or less vaguely familiar (faces belonging for the most part to men celebrated in the world of art and letters, for the Palladium was 'cultured' and non-political), he felt anxious to identify the owners of countenances hitherto known to him only through the medium of photographers' windows, and had been displaying, consequently, for an hour past, a keenness of interest in his fellow-diners which his host found decidedly amusing.

That gentleman answered the young man's last eager question by another.

"Which friend? The black, old personage who nodded to me a moment ago?"

"No, no! The good-looking chap who just went out."

"Oh, that was Carew! In high spirits, apparently, as well he may be. I'd as soon change lots with that youngster as with any man you could find for me in London to-night. Never was there a luckier fellow!"

"Indeed?" Markham ejaculated.

To leave the note of interrogation in the young soldier's ingenuous face unanswered, would have been an act of downright cruelty. Mr. Mereweather, albeit his weekly articles in the *Monday Review* were among the most ferocious appearing in the columns of that pungent journal, was a humane man in private life. He replied good-naturedly:

"A little while ago he was simply a junior clerk in some Government department—I forget which—of whom nobody had ever heard. That book of his literally made his fortune. Society took him up instantly—set him up, rather—and fell down and worshipped him. Already he has such a reputation that he can make what terms he pleases for his work; the publishers are fighting for him as keenly as the duchesses. And as if this were not enough, some obscure relative of his has just been obliging enough to leave him a trifle of sixty thousand pounds! Really, the story sounds like a romance."

"Quite so," the younger man responded. "Carew, I think you said."

"Austin Carew. Surely you must have heard the name before?"

"I'm not sure." Captain Markham's tone was even more dubious than his words. "I may have heard it mentioned. But it's only a

week since I landed, and we didn't get many new authors to read up there among the Chins. I don't know that I should care to change places with that fellow particularly," he added reflectively.

"No?" Mr. Mereweather, absorbed in the dissection of his portion of wild duck, scarcely looked up.

"No," with decision. "The run of luck is too prodigious; a *série* of that kind can't go on for ever. I should always be looking out for some sign of a turn in the tide. Perhaps I shouldn't, though," interrupting himself, with a laugh. "If the good fortune were one's own, I suppose one would hardly consider it good fortune—rather the natural reward of transcendent merit, very likely. That is Carew's view of the matter, no doubt."

Captain Markham's conclusions were over-hasty. "That" was not altogether "Carew's view." On the contrary: as this fortunate person, having shut himself into the hansom he had hailed on leaving the Palladium, sped away to his destination—a great party at the house of a great lady, where all that was most distinguished in English politics, art and literature would presently be found assembled together—he felt a very distinct conviction that fate was dealing with him in a manner entirely above his deserts.

With those dealings he was more than content. Being of a simple nature, he had never attempted to conceal from himself his delight in his own success in the world that was still so fresh to him, and the honours which had as yet lost none of their bloom. But it was not upon these good things that his mind was running to-night. He was going to meet the woman he loved—the woman in whose eyes he had surprised, only a few hours since, an acknowledgment which had straightway lifted him to heights of joy unscaled till then of his very imagination. A new and splendid gladness had swallowed up all lesser satisfactions.

He was absorbed in his passion—no wonder! It was the first of his life. He had had his boyish fancy in earlier days, of course—what man has not?—but that was long since dead and buried. He had not thought of it, or its object, for years until this evening, when something in the sweetness of the living present had stirred a train of associations connected with the dead past. Poor little Cecily! what appealing blue eyes she had, and how simple and childlike and unsophisticated was the love affair in which she figured as heroine! The raw young undergraduate going down to the primitive Cornish village to read, and imagining himself to have met his fate in the person of the vicar's little daughter; the boy of nineteen writing bad verses in honour of the girl of sixteen, and exchanging keepsakes and vows of eternal constancy with her under her father's orchard-wall! He had hazy recollections, too, of an affecting parting, and of a subsequent attempt at correspondence; the latter nipped in the bud by a sensible note from the vicar's wife, returning his first sentimental effusion, and requesting him not to disturb Cecily any

further from her lessons. On the receipt of this missive he remembered to have been in despair for three whole days—and then—and then—Poor little Cecily! It was a very innocent memory.

There his reflections ended, for his destination was reached. All his energies became immediately concentrated to one end—that of getting up the crowded staircase, and into her presence as quickly as possible.

Having accomplished this feat, and enjoyed the felicity of exchanging a bow with her where she stood—a slender, lily-like figure in heavy, glistening white robes, her golden head a good inch or two higher than that of any woman near her, for she was “more than common tall”—on the other side of the room, he had to be content awhile with these achievements. She was already surrounded by an eager group; he at once became similarly beset; and more than half an hour elapsed before he could reach her side, and, while he touched her hand in formal greeting, search her eyes for some reminiscence of their confession of the morning. They were very beautiful eyes: still and clear, of a dark liquid grey, touched now and then by flying shadows which deepened them almost to black, and transient lights which brightened them to hazel. It was these eyes—so said the Prince of Bamberg-Deettingen, that famous connoisseur in female beauty—which made their owner, in his opinion, one of the most beautiful women in Europe.

Carew stood beside this woman and talked to her of the topics of town: the last political on-dit, the new book that was creating such a sensation in theological circles, the merits of a recently-produced play. Under ordinary circumstances, his companion would have borne her full part in such a conversation. But to-night she was very silent.

“I believe you are tired,” the young man said at last, with great gentleness. “I never saw you so pale before.”

“I do feel a little tired,” she answered, “but I am always pale; that is nothing, and means nothing. I am stronger than I look.”

Assuredly she did not look strong. Along with the grace and the queenliness, she had also all the fragility of a lily.

“Suppose we go out on the balcony?” Carew suggested. “It will be cooler there. I saw several people making their way there just now,” he added quickly, seeing her hesitate.

She put her hand on his arm in silence—the beating of her heart would not let her speak—and was angry with herself because it trembled, and she knew that he must feel its trembling. She was thankful to find the balcony, which had been covered over and was both wide and deep, but dimly lighted; thankful that the chair he chose for her should be in its darkest and most isolated corner. There at least, neither he nor anyone else could see her face. A proud woman this: one who, although she had found and tacitly acknowledged her conqueror, still shrank from open admission of defeat.

Proud as she was, and fastidious too—else she would hardly have reached her present age of six-and-twenty free in heart and hand alike—she knew that neither behind pride nor fastidiousness could she shelter herself any longer. For here was a man with whom any woman might be proud to mate, a man in whom there was no trace of untruth, no taint of meanness to tarnish the lustre of his gifts. Other men, set beside her white ideal of honour, had invariably shown some flaw, some speck—this man alone had come forth from the ordeal triumphant.

Carew and his companion sat long upon the balcony; speaking little, and that only of the merest trifles. Gradually the other occupants of the place dropped away, drawn back into the house by the strains of a great virtuoso, who was playing in one of the inner rooms, and they were left alone in their corner. Just then she spoke, in a soft, tremulous voice:

"You had plenty of homage to-night. I—I used to fancy you rather enjoyed that kind of thing. Do you enjoy it still? or are you getting tired of it?"

She held her breath for his answer.

"Not in the least," he answered simply. "I haven't had time to get tired of it. As a rule, I must confess with shame that I enjoy it very much. To-night—well, to-night doesn't count. I wanted to get away to something better. To—this."

His honesty had stood her last pitiful test triumphantly. She could have sobbed for joy and relief; and, just because the tears were close to her eyes, she forced herself to laugh.

"Thank you!" she returned lightly. "That was very prettily said, considering you were bound to say something of the kind."

He drew a quick, deep breath. Then he remarked quietly: "I think that was rather ungenerous."

She was silent an instant before replying. "Yes," she said slowly. "You are right. It was ungenerous. Forgive me, please."

For answer he laid his hand one moment upon hers, which rested on the arm of her chair. "It was not like you," he said.

"No," she admitted. "But I am not like myself at all to-night; I don't know myself." She rose hurriedly to her feet. "I—I think we had better go in now," she faltered breathlessly.

But he had risen with her, and now barred the way. "Helen!" he said appealingly. "Helen!"

She moved slightly, and the movement brought her face into partial light. She turned it towards him, pale and imploring, the lips quivering, the eyes full of tears. "Not now!" she pleaded. "Not to-night!"

He drew back instantly. "It must be as you wish, of course," he said submissively, striving to steady his passion-shaken voice. "Will you let me come and see you to-morrow?"

"Certainly." The word escaped her in a whisper; she was barely conscious of having uttered it.

"Thank you." There the colloquy ended.

She turned to re-enter the house, her ears filled with the throbbing of her own heart, unable to see distinctly for a mist of sudden tears. Some light drapery, artistically but insecurely festooned about the open doorway, had become loosened from its fastenings; she caught her foot unawares in a fold of it which encumbered the threshold, stumbled, and would have fallen, had not Carew, who was close behind, saved her dexterously.

"Are you hurt?" he asked anxiously, feeling her tremble.

"No," she answered quickly. "Oh, no!"

She released herself gently from his hold; she moved to pass him by. Her eyes, glowing under their wet lashes, encountered his; she hesitated, paused, and then—neither knew how it happened—but all at once his arms were about her, and he was clasping her close to his breast, and their lips had met and mingled in the passion of a kiss.

For one moment only she lay quivering in his embrace; the next, she was standing beside him again, and took his arm without a word. Together they moved forward into the world, like creatures only half-awakened from a dream.

Carew did not regain his full consciousness till he found himself out of the house, walking homewards through the cool night air. Then he wondered vaguely whether he had done anything very foolish before making his escape. *She* had disappeared immediately, he knew; he recollected hearing her tell someone she was tired, and would like to go home. To himself she had not addressed an additional word; nor, indeed, had he spoken to her—not so much as to say good-night. Their farewell had been taken before.

Their farewell! He shuddered profoundly at the idea of a real farewell between them, and then laughed suddenly at his own folly. Truly he had lost his head in the intoxication of his great happiness! else he would never have conjured up such an impossible phantom as the notion that anything could rob him of her now. The laugh was still on his lips as he sprang up his own doorsteps, and fitted his latch-key to the lock.

His servant came forward to meet him in the hall. "There is a person waiting to see you, sir," he observed, while helping his master off with his light overcoat. "A young lady."

"A young lady!" Carew's voice and countenance alike expressed only the purest astonishment—a fact, which his man, who had looked rather for some sign of annoyance or embarrassment, noted with surprise. "Did she give her name?"

"Yes, sir. Miss Gray. She seemed quite a lady, else I shouldn't —"

"Of course!" Carew interrupted, frowning slightly. "You put her in the drawing-room, I suppose?" And he ran upstairs, three steps at a time. Gray? Gray? His married sister had some connections of that name, whom he knew pretty well. Then there were

Bernard Gray's—his old schoolfellow's—people; and the vicar in Cornwall, too, little Cecily's father—his name was Gray.

He entered the drawing-room as this last recollection rose in his mind. It was half in shadow, lighted only by one heavily-shaded lamp, and he could barely make out, at the far end of it, a little figure starting up from the sofa at the sound of the opening door. He bowed.

"I am sorry," he began courteously, "that you should have had to wait for me—I hope you haven't been here long. My servant tells me —"

"Austin! don't you know me?" cried a girlish voice.

Carew started violently as his visitor moved impulsively forward into the light, holding out a small shaking hand. "Cecily! Miss Gray! The man said Miss Gray, but I didn't think —" with difficulty he recovered himself sufficiently to take the proffered hand. "Is it—is it really you?" he asked, rather foolishly.

"Yes, it is the real Cecily," the girl answered, smiling faintly. Now that she stood within the radius of the lamp, Carew perceived her to be still extremely youthful in appearance: in her tumbled, unfashionable cambric dress and shabby little sailor hat, she looked little more than a child. "I am so thankful to have found you," she said, with a half-smothered sob. And then he noticed that her pretty face—it was a very pretty one—was a good deal disfigured by recent tears.

"And I am very glad to see you," he responded, in a kindly, if slightly constrained tone. "But I am afraid you are in trouble? Can I —"

"I am in the most *awful* trouble," she interrupted, grasping his hand tighter, and looking up at him in piteous appeal. "And, when I tell you, I know it will sound as if I had been false. But, oh! don't be angry with me, please! for indeed, *indeed*, Austin, I was really true to you all through. Only I am such a coward, and you know mamma's determined way."

Distressed, puzzled, and a good deal alarmed to boot, he murmured something incoherent about her having been a child "in those old days."

"Perhaps I was," she rejoined. "But I am sure I cared for you just as much as if I had been really grown-up. And I have never altered—never. Only we got poorer and poorer, and they urged me so to marry him, and I dared not say anything about you, and so, at last, I promised. Oh, forgive me!" She broke down, weeping pitifully.

"I have nothing to forgive," he answered, a strange, terrible shiver creeping over him and chilling him to the heart. "But you must not stand like this. Sit down, and tell me how it is you are here, and what I can do for you."

She was too agitated to notice that his words were singularly unlover-like; she only felt that they were kind. Sitting beside him on

the sofa, still clinging, child-like, to his hand (the seven years that had elapsed since he saw her last seemed to have left her just as much of a child as ever), she faltered out her story.

It was a touching little story, in her artless broken telling of it—touching, and yet so commonplace! The young girl, living on year after year in the secluded Cornish hamlet, faithful to the one bright dream of her youth; too utterly without experience of the world to guess that her lover's memory might be less tenacious than her own, and clinging fondly to the expectation of that time when he should have won fortune enough to return and claim her. In the vicar's crowded home, sickness and increasing poverty; then the kindly doctor who had stepped in with timely and generous help, smitten by the fair face of his poor patient's eldest-born, and developing into the persistent suitor; the girl's resistance to his suit; and the parents' arguments, entreaties, angry reproaches finally, vanquishing that resistance, even to the fixing of the very wedding-day. And, on the eve of this, the poor child, losing all self-control in her passion of repugnance and remorse, ignorant of the rashness of the step she was taking, flying desperately from her impending fate to take refuge with her early lover.

All this Cecily told, and was long in telling it, repeating herself often and frequently interrupting her narrative with bursts of self-reproach. Carew sat and listened, shading his eyes, after the first, with his disengaged hand. Every fresh sentence that fell from the lips of the girl at his side only sealed his fate the more irrevocably; while Cecily spoke, he saw his own doom—and that of another—writing itself out before him in letters of fire. When she finished, and he uncovered his face to reply, it was like the face of a dead man.

He was silent an instant, struggling for the words which in honour he was bound to speak next. There was no evading the truth: he had pledged himself to this simple child. Could he tell her, in the face of the pledge, that he acknowledged no tie between them? Condemn her, most innocent, to be branded with lifelong disgrace, because her affections had chanced to be less fickle than his own? Leave her to bear the unrealized consequences of an act resulting directly from her implicit faith in his plighted word? He could not—even for *her* sake. The man was not made to do such things. Rather, having sworn, he would abide by his oath—even through a worse bitterness than that of death.

Conquering, he rose to his feet, and laid his hand gently on Cecily's bowed shoulders. "Don't blame yourself, my child. You have been sadly tried, and I—I am very unworthy of all your sweet trust and patience. But I will try to be worthy of them henceforward, as your husband, Cecily. For of course we must be married at once." His voice grew so hoarse that he could not go on.

"Married!" Cecily ejaculated, turning very white. Clearly her ideas had not carried her beyond the preliminary step of finding him

and claiming his help. "But—but are you well off enough yet, Austin? You used to be so poor!"

Even in the midst of his mortal agony, the naïveté of the question had nearly made him smile. "I am no longer poor, Cecily," he answered, with an involuntary glance round the luxurious room. "Some money has been left me, lately; and I can make more by writing. There is no difficulty—of that kind." He drew a deep painful breath. "But your parents—I must let them know—you need not be frightened; they cannot coerce you; and probably they will not object now."

"I left a letter for them—to say I had come to you," she murmured.

An hour later, she was calmly asleep at the Grosvenor Hotel, whither Carew had sent her in charge of his old housekeeper, having first informed that respectable person that Miss Gray, to whom he had been engaged for many years, had come up to London to consult him on a matter of serious importance; a family trouble, in fact; and that her parents would join her the following evening.

For himself, he sat up in his study all night, trying to realize that which had befallen him, and utterly failing. The necessity for effort momentarily at an end, he seemed to lose for a time the very power of thinking.

He sat on till his lamp went out, and the mysterious twilight that precedes the dawn began to steal into the room. All through the night he had scarcely changed his position, or lifted his stricken face from its resting-place on his crossed arms. But at length the first rays of sunlight—his window looked East—struck upon his bowed head, and he sat up, the dumb and dull sorrow that had weighed upon him while the darkness lasted all at once exchanged for an intensity of living and maddening pain. Ah! he knew now what he had done, and what yet remained for him to do—that worst, which must be done before the sun was fully up. No time to lose: already the new day had begun—the day on which he was to have asked Helen to be his wife—the day which, before it closed, must see him the husband of Cecily Gray.

He drew a blotting-book towards him, and wrote:

"Do not expect me to day—or at any future time. You will learn very soon why I could not come. Last night, when I left you, I swear before Heaven I believed myself a free man; but now that I find this is not the case, only one course remains to me—that I am taking. At least, I am less dishonourable in breaking my faith to you than I should be if I dared to keep it.

"I do not ask your pardon; it would be a mockery. I know you cannot forgive me. Of one thing only I assure you: as I hope for God's mercy, I sinned unwittingly. I ask you to try and believe this, if you can.

"A. C."

His agony in writing had made his note obscure and incoherent ; his will had rendered it bald, brief, and empty of all attempt at self-justification. No such attempt, he knew, could avail him anything with the woman whom he addressed.

He crept out into the still damp and chilly streets, reached the house where she lived, and dropped the letter, shuddering, into the letter-box, where, in an hour or two, they would find it and take it to her—to her ! who lay upstairs unconscious, with his kiss yet warm upon her lips, perhaps murmuring his name in her innocent sleep. "Oh God ! was I so false ?" he groaned aloud in his anguish, as he turned away.

The worst was over now. Through all that immediately followed—the meeting with Cecily's parents (who, poor souls, were not inclined to be too hard upon their daughter when they discovered the eligibility of the *parti* for whom she had thrown over the bluff country surgeon), the hasty marriage, the subsequent departure with his new-made wife for the Continent—he moved with as little excitement and emotion as though he had been acting on behalf of some other person. He could almost have persuaded himself that he was so acting. His old self had died, so he believed, at Helen's door in the grey of the May morning.

Time, of course, soon dissipated this delusion. The old self re-awoke to life, and there was an end for ever of the dead calm which had succeeded its seeming death. Many were the times, during the first year following his marriage, when the mere effort to keep his secret agony hidden from his gentle companion, and to show himself invariably sympathetic and responsive in the midst of the torture at work on brain and heart, proved so great that he nearly broke down under the strain. "A little more of this, and I shall go mad," he said to himself more than once.

He found temporary refuge from these thoughts in hard work. Taking up his pen, listlessly at first—no desire to write prompting him—he soon began to grudge every moment spent elsewhere than at his desk. He toiled as he had never toiled in his life before : feverishly, fiercely, unremittingly, so wearing out his body in the desperate attempt to distract his mind, that, at the close of a single twelve-month, he had aged in appearance by ten years.

Cecily—having once or twice ventured a timid remonstrance, only to learn that all remonstrance was vain—could do no more than mourn the increasing change in him in her childish, helpless fashion. The poor little girl was not, after all, very happy in her romantic marriage. Kindly and even tenderly as Austin always bore himself towards her, she was never wholly at ease in his presence. He was not the Austin whose image had been so long enshrined in her innocent heart, but a magnificent person who resembled him in certain points, and who gave her thoughtful kindness in the place of love. "Why did he ever become a great author ?" the poor child

sighed bitterly to herself; and again: "He ought to have had a clever wife—one who could help him, and understand. Perhaps he would have forgotten me, and married some woman like that—if I had not gone to him." The idea bred a doubt: "Perhaps he had forgotten me already." And then came the useless, passionate cry: "Oh, I wish, I wish I had never done it!"

She cried herself to sleep that night. Austin, stumbling upstairs, spent and dizzy with fatigue, in the small hours of the morning, could not but see, blind as he was, the traces of the half-dried tears upon her cheek, and was particularly full of tenderness for her next day. But he never inquired into the cause of her secret sorrow. Perhaps he dared not.

He did his best for her. For her sake, he overcame his shrinking from old friends and new acquaintances alike, and forsook the hermit-existence which he craved above all things. Fancying she wearied of the comparatively quiet life they led in Northern Italy, he offered to take her to Rome for the winter. At this proposal she looked doubtful.

"Wouldn't it be better to go back to London," she suggested diffidently, "where you have so many friends?" Clearly some acquaintance had fired her imagination with an account of his social triumphs.

He could hardly forbear a shudder as he answered: "I am anxious to stay abroad a while longer, dear, for several reasons. I hope you don't dislike Italy?"

"Oh, no!" she replied dutifully. "It is very nice, I think."

"And I am sure you will like Rome," he went on cheerfully. "There is any amount of society to be had there, and you will meet plenty of pleasant people. I think we had better say Rome in December."

To Rome they went, and remained there several months, entering more or less into the winter gaieties of the place. The change did the young wife good. She had little time during the day for brooding over her disappointments, and returned home at night to sleep soundly after her dancing. As for Carew—late hours abroad meaning later vigils at home for him—he grew more haggard and heavy-eyed than ever. In spite of the racking headaches from which he constantly suffered, and the fact that he had just launched a new book with brilliant success, he chose to work as desperately as before, rarely leaving his desk now till dawn. Had he pleased, he might easily have become as much a *persona grata* in Roman palaces as he had once been, for a brief space, in Belgravian drawing-rooms. But his taste for social homage was gone, and the Roman world pronounced him dull and unresponsive—a most unattractive and disappointing lion.

By the end of the carnival season he was thoroughly fagged out. At the German Ambassador's Shrove-Tuesday ball, he found himself halfway through the evening, so faint with fatigue that, knowing

Cecily was dancing, he made his escape to the ante-room, and there sat down to rest. The place was cool and quiet, and for a while he remained its only tenant.

Presently, however, two ladies—Englishwomen, and strangers to him, came in and sat down on a sofa near the outer door. They were talking somewhat eagerly, in clear and rather high voices, and it was impossible for him not to overhear their conversation.

"Yes, she was there," said the elder of the two. "Looking a perfect ghost! Really, she shouldn't wear white now. Her cheeks matched her gown exactly."

"Then she *is* here for her health? I don't think much of the Roman climate for delicate lungs, myself."

"Oh, it's not the lungs that are affected! It's the heart. Yes, very sad—isn't it? I had it from Lady Mary herself."

"They have heart complaint in the family, haven't they?" said the younger lady.

"Not that I'm aware of. Sir George Carmichael asked Lady Mary if there had ever been any great shock to the system. He thought her symptoms pointed that way; and, oddly enough, Dr. Matthews here put the very same question. Unluckily for the diagnosis, Helen never had an accident, or a trouble in her life."

"Rather imprudent of her to go out of an evening, under the circumstances, isn't it?"

"Well, the doctors say she is to be amused; all doctors say that now-a-days, you know, and—why, here they are! Ah, she is wearing black to-night—much more sensible ——"

Three new guests had just entered the ante-room. The foremost two—an elderly lady and a soldierly-looking young man—were people Carew had never consciously seen before; behind them was Helen—a Helen the shadow of her former self, spirit-like in her trailing black robes, blanched to the whiteness of the stephanotis in her bosom.

As she advanced with her companions, the ladies near Carew rose; and, involuntarily, he rose also. His nervous movement displacing his chair, made her turn towards him. For the first time since that moment, two years ago, when she had sunk upon his heart, their eyes met.

He saw her start very slightly, and then stiffen into the rigidity of a lovely statue; her colourless lips, an instant parted, closed again in cold and unyielding lines as of marble. But she did not immediately withdraw her eyes. She deliberately suffered them to rest upon him for a moment; then, still deliberately, turned away, and responded to the greeting of her friends.

The whole party passed on together to the ball-room. Carew stood still in his place. Her brief glance had held so much of intense and burning scorn that he felt as though it had scathed him from head to foot. All the things that he had suffered hitherto were as nothing beside the anguish with which he beheld his condemnation written in the eyes of his last love.

Thenceforward those eyes, calm, un pitying, fixed in their unwavering contempt, haunted him continually. They distracted his throbbing brain in working hours; they robbed him of his brief spells of broken sleep. He withered daily under the vision of them, feeling them burn into his very soul. Besides, had he not seen and heard? Seen the doom that was written in her face? Heard others discuss the problem to which he held the key? She was dying of that very contempt with which she had pierced him through and through.

Since it was Lent, he could guard himself, at least, against all immediate risk of meeting her again. Cecily had now friends enough ready to escort her to the ecclesiastical functions of the season. He shut himself up in the house, and tried to write. But he found no escape, even in his ideal world, from that torturing recollection; and at length work itself became a mockery. He sat, hour after hour, pen in hand, before a sheet of blank paper. Sometimes one blurred and blotted paragraph represented a whole night's toil.

Grown desperate one day, between headache and failure, he took his hat and went out. Surely it was an evil fate that led him to the Borghese Gardens! For he had not been there half-an-hour when, turning into one of the least frequented side-walks, he saw, at only a few paces from him, Helen's slender figure.

She was seated alone on a bench under a magnificent ilex, holding a book in her hand; at the sound of his footsteps she closed the book, and rose hurriedly. "At last!" she began. "I thought you were never coming back. Where——" There she came to a dead stop; then, hastily recovering herself, moved to pass him by.

He drew back a step, leaving her path free. But this time her strength was not equal to her courage. She trembled, wavered, caught at a projecting branch of the tree, and missed it. Next moment she was lying at his feet.

He raised her in his arms and carried her—not without difficulty, for his physical strength had begun to fail him very markedly of late—to the edge of a fountain a little distance off. There, kneeling on the turf beside her, and supporting her golden head on his left arm, he dipped a handkerchief in the water, and pressed it to her brow and lips. For two or three minutes she lay absolutely without sign of life. Then she stirred, and the terror at his heart gave way a little. "What is it? Where am I?" she asked faintly, opening her eyes.

"You are in the Borghese Gardens." He kept carefully behind her, glad to think that his voice was too hoarse for recognition. "You have had a faint, I think. Pray don't try to move yet."

"Thank you very much," raising herself determinately. "I am much better now. It is quite over—the faintness; I am so sorry to have troubled you. My friends are in the gardens, and there is a carriage waiting for us. If you will kindly give me my hat, I will try to go to it."

He picked up the hat, and helped her silently to her feet. "Oh,

thank you!" she began to say, and the words froze all at once upon her lips. "*You!*" she exclaimed in tones vibrating with indignation. "You have—have *dared!*"

"I could not leave you to die," he answered humbly.

"I would rather have died!"

"Than that I should have touched you? Doubtless!" he returned quietly. "I knew that; still, it was my duty to do what I could. Not as a friend or acquaintance, simply as your fellow-creature. The merest stranger——"

"Ah, if you were a stranger!" She had laid her hand on the pedestal of a statue that stood near, but she scarcely needed the support. Her cheeks were actually flushed. "But you are not—that."

"No, something less. As a stranger, I might dispute your right to deny me the privilege you would not deny the poorest beggar in Rome."

"You think me unjust!" she cried with flashing eyes. "Let me remind you——"

"Pardon me!" he interrupted. "You mistake; I do not think you unjust at all."

She drew a long breath, gazing at him in a kind of astonishment. His ashen face bore witness to the intensity of his past suffering; his lips quivered with the agony of his humiliation; he had just expressly admitted the justice of her condemnation of him. And yet—the strange truth remained—in all this there was nothing of that coward shame which a man, convicted out of his own mouth, of baseness, might have been expected to show in presence of his judge.

It was he who broke the curious silence that had fallen upon them. Her friends—should he look for them? Or would she go to the carriage, as she had said?

She chose the latter alternative. And when, as she began to move feebly in the direction of the gates, he said: "You must permit me to see you safe there." She did not forbid him to follow.

He kept a step or two behind her all the way. Just before they reached their destination, she turned suddenly, and faced him.

"I am doing a strange thing, I know," she said hurriedly. "But—I have a fancy that I shall not live long—and I don't wish to judge you hardly. If there was anything—anything that you might have said, that you did not say—tell it me now. I am ready to hear it. But I am mad!" she broke off passionately. "What on earth could there be?"

"Nothing," he answered hopelessly. "If I could tell you the whole story, it would not soften your scorn of me one whit. Being what you are, you must judge me as you do—for the present."

There was an instant's silence, so profound that they might almost have heard the beating of each other's hearts. The spring breeze sighed softly through the trees overhead; a bird whistled

cheerily to his mate ; from far-off came the sharp cry of a cicala. He drew a step nearer.

"The letter killeth, you know," he said, looking at her with a strange gleam in his sunken eyes. "And it is in the letter that I am guilty—the letter that killeth." He muttered the four words under his breath once or twice, still gazing fixedly at her. "The spirit-one comes to that by-and-bye, when the killing is over. Elsewhere—I fancy sometimes—elsewhere—you will understand——"

But at this she made a little silencing gesture with her hand, and walked on.

Her friends were waiting for her at the gates. There had been some mistake about the *rendezvous*, Carew heard one of them say. As soon as he saw her safe in their hands, he drew back, not waiting for thanks. Nor, indeed, did Helen proffer any.

As she sank back in the carriage, however, her heart smote her—her woman's heart. His face, oh ! his face ! And then that strange reserving of his defence for another world. No, she could not leave him without some sign of adieu. She leaned forward.

But it was too late. Someone else leaned forward too, anxious with kind officiousness to shield her from the sun, and veiled her tardy movement. The carriage drove away. He remained motionless where she had left him, feeling every beat of her horses' hoofs upon the hard white road strike heavily into his brain.

Three weeks elapsed before Helen was again able to drive out. It was on a lovely afternoon in May that she left the house for the first time, accompanied by Lady Mary. Her cousin, Captain Markham, who was "doing" the lions of Rome with characteristic vigour, occupied the third seat in the open carriage, and kept up an incessant flow of talk with Helen's aunt.

Helen herself remained silent, paying little or no heed to her companions' conversation. Her whole attention was given to the streets through which she was passing, and the persons lounging, or jostling each other, on the pavements. The crowds of these were very great, for, on this ideal May day, all Rome appeared to be abroad.

They had reached the outskirts of the city, when Lady Mary was startled by a sudden movement at her side, a quick tremulous whisper. "It is all right now. He saw me." Turning rapidly, she saw Helen, who had leaned forward as if to greet a passing acquaintance, sink back again upon her cushions.

"Who was that, dear ?" inquired the elder woman. "I thought you bowed to some one," she added, for Helen's face showed that she was unconscious of having spoken aloud.

"It was Mr. Carew," in the same shaken whisper.

"Mr. Carew !" Lady Mary repeated, looking over her shoulder with a puzzled air. The carriage was passing through a narrow lane, flanked on either side by high walls, in which, as far as the old lady

could see, there was not a human being visible, except a solitary small boy asleep under an archway. "I didn't see him. Are you certain, Helen?"

"Quite certain—" dreamily. "And I know he saw me. I am thankful for that." Then, seeming to wake suddenly from her pre-occupation—"Oh, yes, I am quite certain," she said, speaking this time in her natural voice, and flushing slightly.

"I suppose it was the sun that prevented my seeing him. It was full in my eyes," said Lady Mary.

"But it wasn't in mine," Captain Markham objected. "And, excuse me, Helen, I really think you must have had an hallucination of the senses. There wasn't a soul——" he checked himself at a peremptory sign from Lady Mary, asking adroitly, "Do *you* know Carew, Aunt Mary?"

"No. Neither does Helen, really. Only we found out the other day that he was the person who assisted her so kindly when she fainted in the Borghese Gardens. I wanted your uncle to call and thank him—but Helen thought that unnecessary. Have you met him, Bertie?"

"I've seen him in town, that's all. He used to be a great favourite in society."

"So we are told. People here don't like him particularly; they say he is unsociable, and gives himself exclusive airs. There is a pretty little wife who seems to go everywhere, however."

Captain Markham nodded. "I was introduced to her some weeks back, at a picnic. Pretty enough; but not the sort of woman one would have thought likely to fascinate a man of Carew's stamp."

"No?" said Lady Mary, and dropped the subject.

When the drive was over, and Markham, having deposited his charges at their own door, was about to turn away, she managed to detain him. "I must really beg your pardon for shutting you up so brusquely this afternoon, my dear boy," she said, as soon as Helen had passed into the house. "But the doctors say it is not well to contradict her just now, or excite her in any way. And, you know, it really doesn't matter much if she *did* bow to someone else by mistake for Mr. Carew."

"Not in the least," Markham agreed with a smile. "Especially," he added to himself, as he strode down the sunny street, "as there was no one else there to bow to. What the deuce could have made her think she saw him?"

Finding plenty to entertain him in the Roman streets, Captain Markham did not return to his aunt's house till close upon dinner-time. Entering the drawing-room rather hastily before going upstairs, he came, not only upon Lady Mary herself, and Helen—who sat in a low chair, wearing a more tranquil expression than he had seen on her pale face these two years past—but also upon Dr. Matthews, who had evidently just concluded his daily visit.

"Certainly there is improvement—marked improvement," he was saying in a complacent tone, as Markham opened the door. "Ah, Captain Markham, how do you do? You look as if you had some news to give us."

"Only news that will be none to you, I suspect," replied Markham, who certainly did look slightly excited. "Of course you have heard about poor Carew? I suppose he was a patient of yours?"

"No, my friend Dr. Farebrother attended him. He told me it was a serious case—inflammation of the brain, constitution broken down by systematic over-work—but he quite hoped to pull the poor fellow through. You don't mean to say——?"

"Yes. Died this afternoon, without recovering consciousness. They say the poor little wife is in a terrible state. She was not at all prepared for this."

"Poor young creature!" ejaculated Lady Mary, whose kind eyes were full of tears. "And what a sadly premature ending of all that brilliancy! With such a future before him—everything to make him happy—when did you say it happened, Bertie?"

"Early this afternoon. So you see, Helen," turning to his cousin, "it certainly was *not* Carew whom you saw in the Via. Good heavens, what is the matter with her?"

Lady Mary rushed forward with an exclamation of dismay. But the old physician interposed. "Gently, if you please; stand back, both of you; let *me* go to her," he said.

They stood back, awed by his manner, while he loosened the collar of his patient's dress, and, stooping, laid his ear for a moment against her heart. Lady Mary clutched Markham's arm tightly.

"I believe they are not dangerous—these faints," she whispered tremulously. "But they always frighten me; and to-day she looks worse than usual. However, don't be nervous; she will come round in a minute or two—they never last long. Dr. Matthews knows—Dr. Matthews!" breaking suddenly into appeal, as the old man drew himself slowly upright again. "Tell him what it is—only a faint."

But Dr. Matthews was silent, looking into his companions' blanched and terrified faces with grave, compassionate eyes.

91
Frank
JH

A STUDIO FLAT.

I.

"HUNDRED and six—hundred and seven—hundred and eight! The top at last, thank goodness! If ever I come here, I shan't go downstairs more than once a-week!"

The flats known as Raphael Gardens have no lifts; hence they let at moderate rents to artists and people whose legs are generally longer than their purses.

Heaven forbid that such a sweeping rule should be applied to Miss Amiel Carew! In respect of her purse, she was pretty well-to-do, and lived from choice, not necessity, in an artists' quarter, trying to fancy herself more of an artist than, perhaps, she really was. As to her length of limb, she was five feet seven in height and very well-proportioned; but the stairs at Raphael Gardens tried even her zealous and hopeful climbing.

She knocked at the door of the Studio Flat; it opened from inside without any visible agency.

"I suppose I go in," Miss Carew said aloud, doubtfully. It was her habit to dare anything mentally, but to make little verbal appeals of this sort to support her character as a young lady. She shut the outer door and entered a dim passage, obscured with looped curtains; beyond was a wide open space, full of dusty afternoon sun.

"I have an order to view this flat from Messrs. Wheeler and Wallby," she went on, sending her voice, sweet and rather shrill, before her: it is so awkward if people don't know you are coming in. "I hope this is a convenient time to — Good heavens! are you ill?"

A young man was leaning against the mantelpiece; he had risen to touch the knob by which the front door was opened, and his thin white hand still strayed shakily along the wall, while his head had slipped forward upon the mantel-board. He was faint, and but for his other hand's clutch at the high wooden shelf, would probably have fallen.

Amiel Carew not only knew what to do, but managed to do it in a few seconds. She pushed the big armchair close to him, pushed him gently into it, with his head tilted back, opened a window just behind him, and rubbed eau de Cologne from a small bottle she happened by good fortune to have in her pocket behind his ears. He began to sigh deeply, and opened the blackest eyes in the world, which looked as if they were set in saucers of the painter's own Indian ink.

"I beg your pardon: I don't know what —" he began.

"I beg *your* pardon, but please hold your tongue for a little," she

interrupted. "Hold this and smell it," putting the flask of eau de Cologne into his hand, "while I get something to cover you. You are shaking with cold, but we must have a little air."

And in a minute she had an old Inverness and an Algerian blanket tucked well round him.

He shut his eyes and opened them again, this time a trifle less wearily. "May I speak now?"

"You had better not; there is no need. I am Miss Carew, and I brought an order from the agents to see your flat. I want one for myself, and I think I should like Raphael Gardens. You managed to open the door for me, but then this faintness came on. If you will allow me, I will just look round the studio; and by the time I have made up my mind you will be all right again."

This was not giving him much time to recover; for, as a rule, Miss Carew made up her mind instantaneously about everything. She had decided when she opened the window that this flat, in spite of the hundred and eight steps that led to it, was just what she wanted.

Now, however, she went a little more closely into detail; the view into the spring green of the park opposite was exquisite—it is a people's park, but it buds and blossoms all the same—that corner would hold her big oak settle—that pearl-coloured strip of river barred by an ink-black bridge was a possession for life—yes! the Studio Flat would do—at least as far as the studio. She came back to the black-eyed man in the chair; he struggled free of the coat and the blanket and tried to get up.

"Don't, please! or I shall feel that I have come at a very inopportune time to disturb you."

"Indeed, no! I don't know what would have happened if you had not come in and helped me! That is the worst of flat life—one is terribly alone."

"Have you no servant?" She was sorry directly she had asked the question, for the artist blushed, though it was something to have the assurance that he still had any blood in his body.

"No; the fact is, things have not been going very prosperously with me lately, and I had to give up the housekeeper with whom I started. Altogether the place is too large for me."

"May I look at the kitchen and bedrooms for a moment?" She was gone across the passage in a flash, leaving the painter to get up, stretch himself wearily and put away the encumbering wraps—he was horribly ashamed of the momentary weakness that she had witnessed, and in his humiliation almost forgot the outward and visible signs of his poverty which Miss Carew must have also discovered.

On the kitchen table stood a spirit lamp and an open pot of Bovril; there were some stony-looking crusts of bread in a cupboard; a piece of cheese, so very much reduced that the tumbler which was turned over it was too large for the occasion; an empty tin which

smelt of coffee, that was all. Miss Carew had some water boiling over the lamp while she made her researches; she was too much in earnest to hesitate on the score of delicacy; she scraped out the Bovril, salted and tasted it as she paused and stirred the steaming liquid, ran back to the cupboard and dug out, rather than cut, the least dry portion of crumb, and in five minutes carried the little meal into the studio.

"I have brought you your soup," she said quietly; "if you had had it before you would not have had that attack; please drink it now, at once, and then we can talk business."

The young man flushed again, but he did as he was bid. "It is wonderfully good stuff, this Bovril," he said, as he put down the cup empty; "it is so easy to make in a hurry when—when one doesn't want the trouble of going out to lunch. But you make it much better than I do."

"You ought to have real beef-tea two or three times a day," said Amiel, as if she were thinking aloud; "now will you tell me all about the flat, Mr.—Mr.——" She stopped, and looked about for the agent's order.

"My name is Austyn."

"I think it would just do for me, Mr. Austyn, if you could let me have it at once."

"To-morrow, if you like, there is nothing to detain me," answered Dick Austyn.

In the evening of the same day Austyn was dragging his possessions about the studio under the impression that he was packing, when the knocker sounded again, and this time a young man about his own age stood in the entry and looked enquiringly through the looped curtains. "Mr. Austyn," he said in a voice which somehow the painter thought he had heard before, "I hope I am not intruding? My cousin, Miss Carew, who was here this morning sent me to look for her bangle, which she says she must have left on your kitchen-table—may I? My good fellow, don't attempt to move that chest by yourself."

Miss Carew had deliberately put her bracelet on the kitchen dresser, and had ordered her slave and cousin, Dr. Carew, to call for it and give a look at the black-eyed painter.

"A case of clear starvation," said the doctor, reporting later, "that is, starvation and disappointment, which is the same thing if you substitute the mind for the stomach. I've a great idea of carrying him down to Seaford for a week or two when you take over the flat."

"How has he run down so? Can't he paint?" asked Amiel.

"Heaven knows; you ought to be a better judge of that than I; but what you all want nowadays with daubing and dabbling with paints and turpentine when there's real work crying out to be done, passes me."

Dr. Carew fancied himself a utilitarian and a good business-man-friend for his cousin ; in reality, he was romantic and over his ears in love with her.

II.

It was spring again—the buds in the squares were bursting, the People's Park had a green, misty sheen stealing over it morning by morning ; the studios were full of daffodils and of smart visitors, who tiptoed about in front of the pictures, using inappropriate adjectives in wrong places.

Amiel Carew had half-a-dozen pictures on view in the studio flat, and excellent tea and cakes from Buszard. Her exhibition was very popular ; people came again and again to look at her "Goldfinches in a Pear-tree," her "Ducklings and Green Peas," her "Kentish Cobs."

"What I always feel about Miss Carew's pictures is that one can buy them if one likes, they are within one's reach in every sense, and yet she is sufficiently well off not to care a jot whether one does or not. Whereas with some artists, directly one has swallowed a morsel of their bread and butter, poor souls, one feels bound to give them an order, and unless they do pastel heads of oneself or the children, it *is* difficult—and one *must* have tea somewhere these exhausting afternoons."

Mrs. Cheyne-Walker is an art critic of some repute in her own set, and to do her justice, she is very liberal and encouraging towards young artists.

"You are looking very tired and done-up," said Dr. Carew to his cousin one afternoon when everybody else had gone. He frankly announced that he had come to look at her and not at her pictures, and he had done so, attentively and long ; the result was this remark.

"I am a little tired ; I have been working hard to get all these finished in time ; presently, when I know their fate, I will go down to the sea and have a blow before the season really begins."

"Humph ! go down to Seaford" (Dr. Carew had a kind of hobby-home at Seaford, at which he cured people in a most unprofessional manner by means of sea-air and bathing, and country food and early hours), "there are hardly any patients there now ; we have been building, and you can have the whole place to yourself, if you like. I'll come down and tell you what to eat and drink, and bring you all the most trashy novels. I've an idea that this flat of yours doesn't suit you."

"Oh, indeed it does."

"I'm not so sure. Why do you look like a ghost—you didn't a year ago ? And why did that fellow Austyn break down here ? Look at him now—he's as hearty as any man need be, working away."

Miss Carew was dissatisfied with her daffodils, and had pulled them all out on the table before her. Daffodils are delicious things ;

you can put your face down into a bunch of them and imagine all sorts of untold secrets about the Spring.

"Mr. Austyn is working hard, you said?"

"He has a very fine picture if I'm any judge. And he's another man since he got out of this place, and picked up his strength again at Seaford."

"Since he found a friend in you, and picked up his courage again, and his desire to live," said Amiel, putting her hand for an instant on her cousin's, and looking at him with soft, shining eyes; "how dare you pretend to me, when you know quite well what it was that broke him down, and what set him up again?"

"Oh, well, it was you discovered him and his untoward plight." Dr. Carew was an eminently practical, common-place man, but when his cousin Amiel looked at him and touched his hand in that impulsive way, he was disconcerted and lost the thread of his speech. "Lucky for him you found him here, or he would probably have starved himself to death under the impression that he was behaving very magnificently—and Seaforth air did the rest. You had better come and try it, Amiel; let me send down word to Mrs. North to get a couple of rooms ready for you, and leave this atmosphere of turpentine as soon as possible. When will you go?"

"Thank you, David. I will think of it, and ——"

"And not go?"

"And go, as soon as ever my pictures are hung. If you talk like that, I shall think you are only asking me out of politeness, and don't expect me to accept. And if you see Mr. Austyn, you might say to him that my pictures will be here a couple of days longer, and I should like to show them to him if he can spare the time to come—without interrupting his own work, David."

Two days after, Austyn came. He and Amiel Carew had met frequently since their first encounter in the studio flat; he had learnt to laugh about his fainting fit, for he was strong and well and on the fair road to be prosperous again. It was Amiel, the practical and self-reliant, who was a little bit confused when he alluded, laughing, to the Bovril and the Algerian blanket.

Nearly all women—certainly all nice ones—are instinctively maternal and protective: they want to help and "do for" anyone in distress or discomfort, and they do not wait to think of difference of age or sex or position. Later, perhaps, scruples of expediency assert themselves. Even now, after a year's ordinary friendly intercourse, Miss Carew could not look at the dark face and slender figure of Dick Austyn without remembering how unceremoniously she had seized and thrust him into a chair; how she had turned his head to the air, and dashed eau de Cologne down his neck; how she had unfastened the stud of his collar and imperiously pushed him back, and tucked the rugs about him when he tried to rise. Dick might forget, had forgotten everything except an impression of kindness and womanly

interest, but her fingers tingled, and even sometimes her cheeks grew hot as some chance word or movement recalled the scene. The young man was strolling from one of her pictures to another this afternoon, talking as he went, and Amiel, more fulfilled than ever before with this strange, new self-consciousness, sat in the window arm-chair and watched him.

"This is very good," halting at the "Ducklings and Green Peas," which Amiel had studied in a Kentish farmyard the year before—a clutch of yellow, straddling young ducks, unmindful of the future, pulling at a blossoming row of peas. "Every bird has a character——"

"Yes, a duck's character," contemptuously.

"Well, what would you have? You don't want them to look like eagles?"

Amiel laughed, but her "I suppose not," was only half-hearted. She turned round for a minute or two; somehow, while she looked at Mr. Austyn, striding from picture to picture in the studio that had been his own, she could not concentrate her thoughts or words properly. "What is your subject?" she asked.

"Only a bit of coast, beyond Seaford."

"My cousin says it is first-rate. I should like to see it before I go down to Seaford and find out the original."

"I'm afraid I can't go in for a private view this year. I've been working in a little out-of-the-way hole since I came up from the country, and till I know where I am with this picture, I cannot re-establish myself within the pale of respectability even. But if it is hung, as it will be ——"

"You are quite confident? That is a delightful thing to feel."

"Yes; somehow I know this is a successful thing. It may be the reaction from my cropper last year, or it may be that Dr. Carew has tonicked me up to a high state of self-complacency, but I feel certain that this picture will get a place, and a good place, and a price, and a good price."

"And the man who painted it will get a name, and a good name," Amiel finished, kindly.

"If he ever does," the young man answered, coming to a full stop in front of her chair, "it will be thanks to you and your cousin."

"Nonsense!" she said, without looking at him. "How do you call your picture?"

"Where the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles miles on miles," he quoted.

"Have any of the reviewers seen it? Won't you bring it up here, and let it have a chance of being known for a few days before sending it in? I am going away myself, so you could have anyone you pleased at the studio without inconveniencing me, and you could get critics to come here, perhaps, who would not go outside the pale of respectability, as you call it."

"Are you going away before sending in your pictures, and varnishing

day and all? Why, Miss Carew, are you ill? We have been so busy talking that I forgot to ask you how you were—you have been over-working, no doubt."

"Possibly: David says, women have no sense of proportion. I have worked till I am tired—a little tired of everything; and I am going down to Seaford to stop till the appetite for something comes back. Do bring your picture up here to be seen, and when you send it in, let my "Ducklings" go with it. Is it a bargain?"

III.

MISS CAREW went down to Seaford the next day, and wandered over the cliffs in the spring twilight, fancying that here or there Dick Austyn must have his point of view for the "End of Evening." Likewise she routed out an odd volume of Browning from among David Carew's college books, and read and re-read the poem from which Austyn had chosen his title. Amiel could almost repeat "Love among the Ruins," by heart, and yet she always went back to it with fresh zest, picturing to herself that thus Dick Austyn had read it also, letting the exquisite words sink into his soul to be reproduced in those silver touches of after-sunset light which the Art Reviews in all the papers were lauding so highly.

For the "End of Evening" was, as Dick had predicted, a great success; it had been seen at the studio in Raphael Gardens just in time. The art critic of the *Panorama* had recovered from the attack of the gout, which had tinged his earlier critiques, and gave it a hearty reception. The committee had, either for its merit, or for the convenient size of its frame, hung it on the line. Every newspaper that David Carew posted down to his cousin had a notice of it: the illustrated weeklies reproduced it in black and white. Amiel, who was rather languid and depressed in the suddenly warm April weather, which had come with a burst of sunshine since her arrival at Seaford, used to toss aside the magazines and periodicals with which her cousin kept her liberally supplied, and skim through the daily papers for mention of Austyn's work: she even forgot her own "Ducklings" and "Kentish Cobs," both of which had been accepted, in her interest in the "End of Evening."

Mrs. North, Dr. Carew's matron and factotum at Seaford, was very much concerned about Miss Carew, who had been most specially commended to her care by her master. "I don't hold with so much reading myself," she used to say, "howsomever" (this conjunction was Mrs. North's particular favourite) "to see a party quite wrapped up in a book may have its advantages. I won't say it hasn't, but all this fluttering and flittering through the newspapers can't be healthy, and that I've told Miss Amiel, time over time."

Dr. Carew being a modest and very tactful man, kept out of his cousin's way during the first week of her stay in his sanitarium, and

contented himself with sending her every kind of necessary and unnecessary extra by every available means of transmission. On the second Saturday after her coming she began to wonder whether she should ever see anyone from London again, and it was scarcely a surprise when, turning out of the garden-gate into the high road for her afternoon walk on the cliffs, she came face to face with Mr. Austyn, who was racing up from the railway station at a rate strangely at variance with his usual lazy demeanour.

"It's sold, Miss Carew; sold for a hundred and twenty guineas! I heard this very morning, and I rushed off to tell you at once. You know I haven't a soul in the world belonging to me who cares, but I thought you would, and indeed I owe it all—— By Jove, you *are* looking ill! what have you been doing? Doesn't this place suit you?"

An onlooker might have well been struck by the contrast between the faces of the two artists. Dick Austyn's was alight with triumph and ambition; his black eyes were dancing with excitement; he might have stood for an embodiment of Hope. Amiel Carew, a year his junior, was pale and worn-looking, as if with long, anxious watching: the lassitude which her doctor-cousin had remarked ten days before had grown into languor, the colour which sprang suddenly to her cheek when Austyn spoke looked suspiciously like fever; the young man, even in his flush of egotistical satisfaction, was startled and shocked at the change in his friend.

"Have you been suffering? Hasn't Carew prescribed for you?" he went on, in a burst of contrition for his previous self-absorption. "Do you know you look as if you had had an illness since I saw you the week before last. Ought you to be here by yourself, with no one to look after you?" He was genuinely concerned, and held her hand as he poured out his string of questions.

It was almost more than Amiel could bear, though the real nature of what ailed her only revealed itself in that bitter-sweet moment when she stood face to face with Dick Austyn, and knew that his friendly anxiety on her behalf would never cost him a sleepless hour or an additional heart-beat. She pulled her hand away from his almost impatiently, with a quick—

"Oh, I am all right; it is only the sudden warmth that has tried me a little. Tell me about the 'End of Evening,' and who has bought it, and if you have any other orders?"

So the young man talked of his future plans and aspirations: of the introductions that had followed on his recent success, of the pros and cons respecting the advisability of resuming work at once in London, or of taking a run abroad first to some of the Continental galleries. There was nothing that was not possible to the young man with that cheque for a hundred and twenty guineas at his back. Amiel said very little in reply, but he was sure of her interest and her silence did not trouble him.

They were standing on the edge of the cliff, looking westward, when she took a mighty resolve that had been forming in her mind all the while that they walked together; it was one of those audacious, pathetic throws for happiness that some naturally reserved women will make at times of deep mental struggle, which rend the heart from which they came—and result, alas! ninety-nine times out of a hundred, in bitter, remorseful self-scorn. But because the hundredth time the light of a new joy is born of the effort, women will go on making it till the world's end.

"You know," Miss Carew said, in a quiet, rather careful voice, different, if Austyn had had ears to hear, from her usual clear tones, "I have never seen your picture. I have come out here, evening after evening, and fancied that this was the place from which you painted it. I have read those verses of Browning's here, on this very spot, and I think I must have understood something of what you have put into your painting. Of course there has been no gorgeous city here, no chariot racing, no temples and colonnades, but still these Eastern Downs were once peopled with a busy, stirring population, whose boroughs and churches and townships have passed away and left no trace, save a few lines of grey stones where the sheep shelter on windy nights. And so I fancy you have put the old life that is gone, into your 'End of Evening,' and yet have managed to suggest what remains to us this day, what the poet has summed up in that last verse—

"Oh, heart! oh, blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For all centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs, and their glories, and the rest—
Love is best!"

"Why, what are you talking about, Miss Carew?" Austyn asked in astonishment. "Is all that in Browning's poem? I am afraid you will be awfully disappointed in my picture if you expect it to mean so much; it is a simple landscape enough without much suggestiveness, and as for the little lines, I must have picked them up somewhere; in a heading to a chapter, I fancy; for I've certainly never read a word of the rest of it."

"It is getting cold," Amiel said with a shiver. "It is time we were turning back."

When Austyn heard from Dr. Carew some weeks later that his cousin had been lying between life and death with brain fever in the Seaford Home, the artist was not very much surprised, though sincerely concerned. "You know, Doctor, she talked extremely strangely that last day that I saw her; and I thought her looking awfully ill, as if she were in for something serious. I nearly came to tell you about it when I got back to town, but on second thoughts I decided that it was no business of mine."

W. L. Haworth

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N. Hawthorne



Ms. L. GOW.

R. TAYLOR.

"YOU WILL LET ME CALL YOU CHARLOTTE?" SAID TRIX, IN HER PRETTY, INSINUATING WAY.